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THE ROLE OF TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN AMERICAN CHINA POLICY: 1950-  
1963

by

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B.A. University of Central Florida, 1995

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of History  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This study demonstrates that tactical nuclear weapons occupied a central and essential role in US military policy for confronting the Peoples Republic of China between 1950 and 1963. Historians seldom look at tactical nuclear weapons as a separate and distinct component of American foreign policy and generally place these weapons as a subset of a strategic doctrine directed at the Soviet Union. When examined as a separate component of military policy, however, tactical nuclear weapons proved to be indispensable tools for the American leadership to deal with the complex relationship between the United States, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Such weapons allowed each of the three administrations examined in this study (Harry Truman's, Dwight Eisenhower's and John Kennedy's) to commit the United States to defense obligations that would otherwise have been impossible. As these weapons developed from their infancy in the late 1940s through a number of aggressive field deployments in the 1950s, US presidents repeatedly turned to tactical nuclear weapons when considering their military options for confronting China. The role of tactical nuclear weapons strengthened with each passing presidency and with each crisis between China and the United States. From these crises, tactical nuclear weapons evolved from inefficient weapons systems of Korean War policy, to a key element of a defensive military policy to contain China, and, in their final iteration, as an instrument that not only to assured containment, but was also considered as a possible method of depriving China from obtaining its own nuclear weapons.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

Between 1950 and 1963, the United States considered using nuclear weapons against the People's Republic of China no less than eight times. The conditions behind these considerations ranged from the Korean War, two Taiwan Straits crises, contingency planning for expected crises to pre-emptive action against Chinese nuclear weapons development facilities. Each and every one of these considerations involved planning for using tactical nuclear weapons against China.

This study will demonstrate that tactical nuclear weapons evolved to become an essential instrument of American policy for containing China. U.S. presidents identified a clear distinction between tactical weapons and their strategic counterparts and worked to use that distinction to their advantage in maintaining the alliances required to contain the People's Republic of China. This distinct role for tactical nuclear weapons helped to maintain a level of prestige for the American military, which US policymakers felt was necessary in order to preserve the alliance system in Asia.

A considerable historiography centered on nuclear weapons has already been written, but much of it places nuclear weapons in the context of deterrence theory, war avoidance and mutually assured destruction.<sup>1</sup> Other interpretations have been devoted to debating the role of

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<sup>1</sup> Mandelbaum, Michael, *The Nuclear Revolution: International Politics Before and After Hiroshima* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3-12. The utilization of nuclear weapons in this manner has been described by Mandelbaum's premise with the anarchical environment of international politics. Nuclear weapons, he argues, did not remove anarchy from the system of nations, but, instead, revolutionized the means of which nations relate to each other in the post-Hiroshima/Nagasaki age. Nuclear weapons act, by making general war too devastating and



strategic weapons as a restraining influence, limiting the scope of international conflict during the Cold War versus a viewpoint that nuclear weapons de-stabilized the international order and increased risk of global war.<sup>2</sup> These interpretations all attribute to American nuclear policy a single, strategic goal, without regard for the distinctions between tactical and strategic applications.<sup>3</sup> This study will examine the unique role of tactical weapons in achieving the objective of establishing localized and regional military control as part of a defense commitment to an ally in order to fulfill a policy goal of containing China.

### **Terminology and Definitions**

Nuclear weapons exponentially expanded the destructive power of any military force that employed them. This revolution in military ordnance introduced with it a new terminology, required to address the inadequacies of the descriptive terms of the old world. *Nuclear fission* or *fission* is a subatomic process where atoms are split by the bombardment of neutrons. The act of

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eliminating winners in such a war, as a stabilizing influence. Since general war would lead to national destruction, nations pursued policies designed to avoid major war. The pursuit of such war-avoidance policies led to a system of alliances between the superpowers that came to define the Cold War international order. Additionally, Mandelbaum argues that a critical element of war-avoidance lay in a continuous state of military, retaliatory readiness as a means of discouraging aggressive actions, and that the requirement for a continuous state of readiness translated into the nuclear arms race.

<sup>2</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 86, 110. Gaddis supports the theory that nuclear weapons stabilized the Cold War by limiting the scope of conflict. He cites the existence of the US and Soviet nuclear stockpiles as restraining each other and preventing escalation of the Korean conflict. Joseph Gerson, *Empire and the Bomb: How the US uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 4-5. Gerson argues that the United States utilized the destabilizing influence of nuclear weapons to promote an aggressive expansion of American influence on the international stage. By enforcing this policy, Gerson states the US was able to expand its global influence through the use of nuclear blackmail.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Younger, *The Bomb: A New History*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009), 50. The author best explains that the distinction is not recognized is derived from the belief that using tactical nuclear weapons within the framework of limited military action would escalate to general war with strategic nuclear weapons.

splitting or fissioning atoms releases great amounts of energy. *Fusion*, on the other hand, involves the combining of two hydrogen atoms to form a helium atom. The energy released in a fusion reaction is often considerably greater than that released in a fission reaction. *Atomic weapons*, or *Atomic Bombs*, are weapons that use nuclear fission to derive their explosive power. A *Hydrogen Bomb* is an exclusive term for a gravity-delivered weapon that utilizes fusion to create its destructive effects. *Nuclear Weapons* encompass both fission and fusion weapons of all types, and includes bombs, warheads found in missiles, naval ordinance and artillery shells. The *pentomic* military is a term used for the restructuring of the US military at the divisional level which incorporated nuclear weapons into battlefield operations. *Tactical nuclear weapons* refer to nuclear weapons employed directly on the battlefield with the intent of deciding a localized military engagement. *Strategic nuclear weapons* refer to nuclear weapons used against non-battlefield targets such as industrial centers, large population centers or other national infrastructure targets. In the realm of nuclear weapons policy *Counterforce* refers to enemy combatant forces while *Countervalue* refers to enemy population centers.<sup>4</sup> *Deterrence* or *Deterrence Force* is the concept of using the threat of force to deter an opposing state or nation from conducting an action.<sup>5</sup> *Second Strike Force Capability* is the capability of a nation's nuclear forces to survive an enemy first strike in order to conduct retaliatory action.<sup>6</sup> It should be

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<sup>4</sup> "Counterforce and Countervalue," Nuclearfiles.org, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/strategy/strategy-countervalue-force.htm> .

<sup>5</sup> "Deterrence," Nuclearfiles.org, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/history/cold-war/strategy/strategy-deterrence.htm> .

<sup>6</sup> "Report of the Secretary of Defense Task Force on DOD Nuclear Weapons Management: Phase II – Review of the DOD Nuclear Mission, December, 2008, Department of Defense" nuclearfiles.org, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.nuclearfiles.org/menu/key-issues/nuclear-weapons/issues/policy/us-nuclear-policy/weapons/PhaseIIReportFinal%5B1%5D.pdf> .

noted that a tactical weapon may be used strategically, and a visa-versa. The defining element for a nuclear weapon, therefore, is the role for which the weapon is used.<sup>7</sup> *Limited War* is a conflict involving a portion of a nation's military and industrial assets, while *General War* involves a considerable portion, sometimes the entire portion, of a nation's military and industrial capability aimed at warfighting.

### **Methodology and Chapter Outline**

To obtain a clear picture of the role tactical nuclear weapons played in American China policy, eight crises, events and contingency plans were examined. These range from the Korean War (1950-1953), the first major crisis between the United States and China, through 1963 with the end of the Kennedy Administration and the realization that a nuclear-armed China was an inevitability. The following questions were applied to each event, crisis and contingency in this study. Why did US presidents consider military action against China. Did the presidential administrations of Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy truly recognize a distinction between tactical nuclear weapons and their strategic counterparts. What was the degree of importance afforded to tactical nuclear weapons by each president? What factors, both political and military, influenced the considerations for tactical weapon utilization? What specific aspects of China policy led US presidents to resort to view tactical nuclear weapons as an essential component in

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<sup>7</sup> John T Cappello and Gwendolyn M. Hall, "Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Debunking the Mythology," *INSS Occasional Paper 46*, (August, 2002), USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, Colorado.

military planning? Why and how did US presidents become dependent on tactical nuclear weapons when considering military options against China? How then, did each president employ tactical nuclear weapons in policy against China, and how close did these considerations come to actual implementation?

Chapter One examines the Truman Administration's attempts to find a role for nuclear weapons during the Korean War and ultimately deciding not to use those weapons. Historians such as John Lewis Gaddis and Appu Soman attribute fear of Soviet involvement for explaining why the United States did not use nuclear weapons in Korea.<sup>8</sup> This chapter will, instead, show that a lack of tactical nuclear capability played a much more important role than fear of Soviet retaliation. The inability to use nuclear weapons effectively on the Korean battlefield wielded much more influence with the United States' military decision against using them than concerns that the Soviets would interfere. The inability to effectively use tactical weapons also explains how prestige and the perception of American military strength became a driving factor in confronting China. Additionally, this study will reinforce the historiographical belief espoused by Nina Tannenwald that international pressures, in the form of maintaining the alliance, also played a critical role in why nuclear weapons were not used during the Korean War.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Appu K. Soman, *Double-Edged Sword: Nuclear Diplomacy in Unequal Conflicts: The United States and China, 1950-1958*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), 217-218. Soman subscribes to the stabilizing effect of nuclear weapons, but also addresses a destabilizing influence in that the American nuclear stockpile encouraged Truman (and subsequent presidents) toward confrontation because nuclear weapons could be used to extract US military forces from untenable military situations.

<sup>9</sup> Nina Tannenwald, *The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons Since 1945*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Tannenwald presents a new interpretation that challenges the stabilization theory for nuclear weapons. The author argues that an international taboo rather than war avoidance policies, were the reason nuclear weapons were not used during the Cold War. This taboo, directed against all nuclear weapons was created by a loose, unorganized conglomeration of anti-nuclear political movements both in

Chapter Two explores Eisenhower's introduction of the New Look military and his military solutions for ending the Korean War and contingency planning to defend South Korea in the event of a renewed Korean War. Historians such as Rosemary Foote often focus their attention on the extensive diplomatic efforts to end the war and identifying the primary reasons for that end.<sup>10</sup> This chapter will focus on the role of the administration's considerations to use nuclear weapons to end the Korean War, had diplomatic efforts failed. This examination will illustrate how nuclear weapons had moved to a central position in military planning against China. Furthermore, it will be seen that the role of tactical nuclear doctrine had advanced in importance from the Truman Administration, but not quite to the point of becoming a separate option in military policy.

Chapter Three addresses Eisenhower's China policy and the expanded role tactical nuclear weapons would play in the two Taiwan Straits crises. A majority of historians tend to focus attention on Eisenhower's modernization of the US military, called the New Look policy, and the creation of the pentomic military as a strategic response to the Soviet Union by using the nuclear arms race to formulate a war avoidance policy based upon the concept of massive retaliation and mutually assured destruction for any two nuclear-armed powers.<sup>11</sup> This chapter

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the US and abroad. This taboo manifested itself in the form of domestic and international pressures to influence the decisions to refrain from using nuclear weapons.

<sup>10</sup> Rosemary J. Foot, "Nuclear Coercion and the Ending of the Korean Conflict," *International Security* 13, no. 3 (Winter, 1988-1989):108-109.

<sup>11</sup> Campbell Craig, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), xii. Craig builds on the stabilizing theory by explaining Eisenhower's integration of nuclear weapons into the military was a deliberate effort to restrict United States options in any given crisis in order to avoid general war. Craig argues that Eisenhower's nuclear policy consisted of an "all or nothing" tactic, where any consideration of military options carried with it a high risk of nuclear war, thereby forcing the president to choose a diplomatic

will show that Eisenhower's continuance of Truman's China policy, which continued to be influenced by the role of prestige, and the incorporation of tactical nuclear weapons into military policy via the pentomic military created an environment that drove the United States to threaten China with nuclear attack. Tactical weapons played a crucial role by allowing the United States to commit itself to defending the Republic of China and its surrounding territories. Over the course of the administration, tactical nuclear weapons assumed a singular and distinct role in military policy. Though Eisenhower believed in the military utility and supremacy of tactical nuclear weapons, he recognized the political limitations of nuclear weapons, particularly in light of public and international pressures against them.

Chapter Four examines the Kennedy Administration's continued reliance on tactical nuclear weapons in military planning against China. The Kennedy Administration is most often defined historically by its relationship with the Soviet Union, yet twice during his administration, the president planned to attack China with tactical nuclear weapons. This chapter explains how Kennedy recognized the detrimental effects for the United States within the international community for defending Taiwan but still allowed domestic factors to steer policy towards confrontation. Once again, tactical nuclear weapons continued to play an essential role in American planning and considerations as the United States coped with the imminent rise of China as a nuclear-armed, international power, as well as the possibility of Chinese attacks on not just Taiwan or the offshores islands, but also India. Under the Kennedy Administration,

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option, since there was no nonnuclear military option available. This policy, according to the author, is the primary reason why the United States did not enter into war with the Soviet Union during the 1950s.

however, tactical nuclear weapons policy went a step further than previous administrations when they were considered for a pre-emptive nuclear strike against Chinese nuclear weapons development facilities.

## **CHAPTER ONE: TRUMAN, THE KOREAN WAR AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

Truman's nuclear policy during the Korean War is often placed in the context of strategic policy, deterrence and domestic politics. Historian Roger Dingman, for example, makes a case that Truman's actions were designed as much to prove to Republicans that he was tough on Communism as it was to warn the Soviet Union not to interfere in Korea.<sup>12</sup> John Lewis Gaddis argues that Truman used nuclear weapons and the Korean War to justify the massive rearmament of the United States military, as outlined in NSC-68.<sup>13</sup> This chapter will prove that Truman and his advisors sought out various methods in which nuclear weapons could be used during critical moments of the Korean War. It will be seen that even though the Truman Administration explored several methods of nuclear policy, it struggled against technical and political obstacles that blocked efforts to use nuclear weapons. The technology of tactical nuclear weapons had not matured to the point of providing workable systems that could be used against enemy ground forces. This lack of maturity in tactical nuclear weapons threatened the credibility of the United States military while surprisingly strong resistance from United States allies over nuclear weapons, both factored heavily in the decision to refrain from using nuclear weapons in Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy During the Korean War," *International Security* 13, no 3 (Winter, 1988-1989): 63-65.

<sup>13</sup> Gaddis, 107.



### **Setting the Stage: Truman and China**

In late 1949, communist Chinese forces, under the leadership of Mao Zedong, defeated the last of the Chinese Nationalist forces on the Asian mainland, thereby ending a three-year civil war on continental Asia. The Nationalist leader and American ally, Chiang Kai-shek, fled to the island of Taiwan and re-established the Republic of China there. The flight of Chiang and the rise of Mao as a world leader capped a series of events that challenged American policymakers attempting to cope with the new, post-World War Two international order. The aftermath of World War Two erased decades of European dominance over the international order and supplanted it with a new international order that introduced a new set of dominant players and military concepts. The United States, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China would emerge as the leading economic and military world powers. In the year prior to the fall of the Chinese Nationalists, the Soviet Union had blockaded Berlin and conducted its first nuclear weapons test. The events in China, Europe and the Soviet Union combined to impress upon US policymakers, and the American public, that the post-war international order was divided between two diametrically opposed systems, the Soviet Union and China, combined as monolithic communist entities, versus the United States and its allies.

The US president at the end of World War Two, Harry Truman, faced a world devastated by over a decade of worldwide military conflict. The US emerged as the most powerful nation on earth, its military and technical prowess emphasized by the use of two nuclear weapons

against Japan in the waning days of the war. The next most powerful nation, the Soviet Union, occupied much of eastern Europe, and possessed the largest army in the world.

US State Department advisors portrayed the Soviets as a paranoid version of Imperial Russia and called for the use of patience, resolve and material strength to change Soviet policies.<sup>14</sup> China, on the other hand, posed no current military or economic threat to the United States. The immediate attention of the Truman Administration focused on the Soviet Union and Europe.<sup>15</sup>

President Truman also faced domestic pressures from Congress and the American public. Both wanted a rapid demobilization of US military forces from Europe. European leaders resisted de-mobilization, fearing encroachment by the Soviet Union in absence of the US military. Initial post-war plans relied on a US-backed England to control the Soviets in Europe. The collapse of the English economy in 1947, however, rendered that plan untenable.<sup>16</sup> A second plan was then devised, which called for a strong military, including a nuclear deterrent force, the rebuilding the European economy and the creation of mutual defense treaties and military aid packages to US allies.<sup>17</sup>

Enacting this strategy met resistance from the American public, which did not favor losing tax cuts and facing increased taxes and inflation to pay for the plan. To mobilize both Congress and the American public behind this policy, Truman addressed the country on March

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization and Sino-American Conflict, 1947-1958*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 32-33.

<sup>15</sup> June Grasso, *Truman's Two-China Policy, 1948-1950*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1987), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Christensen, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 38-39.

12, 1947, with his Truman Doctrine speech. This speech, designed to gain support for giving aid specifically to Turkey and Greece, described the international order as a conflict between communism and democracy. To protect democracy, Truman pledged that the United States would fight international communism at any location in the world.<sup>18</sup>

Truman's speech succeeded in bringing approval for aid to Greece and Turkey, but generated unforeseen results regarding China. From the point of view of Congress, the situation in China fit neatly into the president's new doctrine. While Truman would rather have selectively enforced the doctrine, Congress viewed the doctrine as a globally inclusive policy. As a result, the powerful conglomerate of political and public forces, called the "China Lobby,"<sup>19</sup> held the president's European policy hostage, agreeing to pass the necessary legislation to aid Greece and Turkey only if similar aid reached the Republic of China. The China Aid Bill, passed in 1948, became part of a compromise deal to ensure passage of European aid legislation.<sup>20</sup>

With the collapse of the Nationalists on mainland Asia in 1949, the United States faced a dilemma over how to treat its defeated ally. The Nationalists were expected to survive for no more than three years.<sup>21</sup> American diplomat George Kennan proposed using the US military to

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<sup>18</sup> Christensen, 50-52.

<sup>19</sup> Earnest R. May, "When Marshall Kept the U.S. Out of War in China," *The Journal of Military History* 66 no. 4 (Oct., 2002): 1005-1006. The author provides the best and most concise description of the conglomeration of American elements that vocally called for continued support of the Nationalists in China. This lobby comprised of national press outlets sympathetic to the Nationalist cause, a Republican majority in Congress which viewed the president as soft on communism, and members of the military, particularly the Navy.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

<sup>21</sup> ORE 76-49 Survival Potential of Noncommunist Regimes in China, Oct 19, 1949, CIA website, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/document/0001098226>.

overthrow Chiang and establish Taiwan as a United States protectorate. Secretary of State Dean Acheson had preferred to abandon Chiang Kai-Shek, and he persuaded the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to accept the same point of view. The Nationalist Chinese, however, still retained support from elements in the United States. Republicans in Congress and the Senate, as well as popular World War Two General Douglas MacArthur argued publicly for the need to deny Taiwan to the Chinese Communists.<sup>22</sup>

In the face of domestic pressure, Truman chose to keep US participation with Taiwan to a minimum. On January 5, 1950, the president went on record to state that the United States would not become involved in the Chinese civil war and that the United States would not have bases in Taiwan or provide military advice to Nationalist forces.<sup>23</sup> A week later, Acheson further clarified the administration's position, stating that the United States considered Taiwan to be

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<sup>22</sup> Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 165-167.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon H. Chang, *Friends and Enemies: The United States, China and the Soviet Union, 1948-1972*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 291-292; Christiansen, 194; Warren I. Cohen, *America's Response to China: A History of Sino-American Relations*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 165-167; Jian Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War: The Making of the Sino-American Confrontation*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 213-216; Andrew J. Nathan, and Robert S. Ross, *The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1997), 56-59; Gaddis, 62-63. The historiography of American China policy can be divided into three interpretations, American responsibility for the confrontation, Chinese responsibility, and a shared responsibility. Adherents blaming the US include Gordon Chang, who cites an American policy geared toward splitting the Sino-Soviet alliance, and Thomas Christensen who identifies Truman's inclusion of Taiwan into the American sphere of influence as part of an anti-Communism policy as fueling the confrontation with China. Historians who blame China include Warren Cohen, who blames Chiang Kai-Shek for refusing to cooperate in a coalition government with the Chinese Communist Party, leading to the resumption of the Chinese Civil War. Chen Jian also argues that China bears the responsibility for confrontation with the US, citing Chinese revolutionary nationalism, the Chinese perception that they held an obligation of loyalty to international communism, and a Chinese political goal of maintaining the dynamics of the domestic communist revolution in China. Andrew Nathan and Robert Ross argue that Mao Zedong always intended to align with the Soviet Union and were obligated to confront the US as part of the Sino-Soviet alliance. Finally, John Lewis Gaddis adopts a middle ground approach, citing US domestic pressures and Truman's lack of clear policy objectives combined with China's self-imposed domestic conditions as leading to a state of confrontation between the two nations.

Chinese territory.<sup>24</sup> Six months later, the outbreak of the Korean War, brought Taiwan back into the sphere of American interest and led to a series of confrontations with China.<sup>25</sup> Through these confrontations, tactical nuclear weapons would become the central instrument of military policy used to contain China.

### **The Korean War Begins**

On June 25, 1950, forces of the North Korean military attacked South Korea and made considerable advances down the peninsula, driving before them South Korean forces and a small contingent of American advisors. Prior to the outbreak of war, Korea did not possess a significant place in American defense policy. The small, peninsular nation that divides the Yellow Sea from the Sea of Japan, shared borders with China and the Soviet Union, and lay less than 100 miles from Japan, was divided into north and south halves in August, 1948, at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The northern half of Korea was ruled by a communist government under the leadership of Kim il Sung. The southern half of Korea was led by President Syngman Rhee, placed in power primarily through the efforts of the United States.<sup>26</sup>

That North Korea might attack South Korea in an attempt to reunite Korea did not escape the attention of the Truman Administration. Secretary of State Dean Acheson felt that should

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<sup>24</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department*, (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, Inc. 1969), 351.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Cummings, *The Korean War: A History*, (New York: Modern Library, 2010), 109-112.

war break out on the Korean peninsula, the US should use the United Nations to deal with the situation, and not the US military.<sup>27</sup> The United States perceived Communist North Korea as a satellite of the Soviet Union. This impression led to the belief that North Korea could not conduct long term military operations against South Korea without substantial Soviet support. Nor did the administration believe China would involve itself in Korea, believing that fear of general war over Korea would drive the Soviets to restrain China from interfering on the Korean peninsula.<sup>28</sup> Even if North Korea attacked, the administration placed its faith in the South Korean military to defend itself.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the administration publicly stated, through Acheson and MacArthur, that Korea was not considered part of the American Pacific defense perimeter.<sup>30</sup>

The June 25 attack itself did not surprise the Truman Administration, but North Korea's remarkable gains against the South Koreans did. The success of this attack, believed only possible with Soviet aid, cemented in the minds of Truman and his advisors that international communism posed a significant threat to American national security.<sup>31</sup> Policymakers in the Truman Administration felt that the attack in Korea presented an opportunity to curtail Soviet

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>28</sup> Memorandum by the Central Intelligence Agency, June 19, 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter referenced as *FRUS*), 1950, Korea, Volume VII, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 109.

<sup>29</sup> Cummings, 72.

<sup>30</sup> Acheson, 357. Acheson stated that the United States Pacific defense perimeter consisted of the Philippines, Okinawa, the Ryukyu archipelago, Japan, the Aleutians and Alaska. Excluded were both Korea and Taiwan. MacArthur publicly identified the same perimeter March 1, 1949.

<sup>31</sup> Wilson D. Miscamble, "The Foreign Policy of the Truman Administration: A Post-Cold War Appraisal," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no 3 Conduct of Foreign Policy (Summer, 1994): 488-489; Robert Griffith, "Truman and the Historians: The Reconstruction of Postwar American History," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 59 no 1 (Autumn, 1975): 31; Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 291-292; Gaddis, 75-84.

expansion and influence. While it was hoped that the North Koreans could be stopped quickly, and by the South Koreans, there remained considerable concern over the reaction of the Soviet Union to any American, or United Nations, actions in Korea. The cautious, prevailing opinion in the administration, especially amongst the military, was that the Soviet Union was not ready for war.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless, as part of a contingency option, the use of nuclear weapons was discussed as a means of eliminating Soviet fighters based in Shanghai. On the evening of June 25, Truman ordered the USAF to make preparations for destroying all Soviet airfields in the Far East region, but not to take action. Army General Douglas MacArthur was to send a survey group to Korea, and the State Department was instructed to determine where the Soviets might act next.<sup>33</sup> Over the next week, while South Korean forces retreated, the United Nations formed a unified command under the leadership of MacArthur.

MacArthur thought the situation in Korea provided a unique opportunity to use nuclear weapons, and requested that the JCS grant him atomic bombs.<sup>34</sup> The JCS already had a contingency to move nuclear weapons to Guam in the event of an Asian crisis, thus the JCS approved MacArthur's request and dispatched ten nuclear weapons from the stockpile to the

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<sup>32</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, June 25, 1950, *FRUS*, 1950, Korea Vol VII, (Washington D.C. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1950), 157-161.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Richard Rhodes, *Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 442-444.

Pacific base. These weapons, however, remained outside of MacArthur's command and required 72 hours to assemble and a presidential order before they could be used.<sup>35</sup>

Even as the United States Air Force (USAF) shuttled nuclear weapons across the Pacific, the higher levels of the military and the administration had developed concerns over their use. Specialists in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs argued that there were few viable targets in Korea and that world opinion would be overwhelmingly negative.<sup>36</sup> A JCS study substantiated the opinions of the Far Eastern bureau, finding that the situation in Korea did not provide a favorable environment for the employment of nuclear weapons. The JCS worried that ineffective use of nuclear weapons would harm the strategic deterrent value of the nuclear stockpile.<sup>37</sup> At Strategic Air Command (SAC), General Curtiss LeMay argued that any nuclear bombardment of Korea should be conducted as part of a larger strategic nuclear bombardment of China.<sup>38</sup> Even those in the administration who advocated the use of nuclear weapons conceded that such employment could have considerable consequences, including escalation into general war with the Soviet Union and alienating US allies.<sup>39</sup>

At this point in the conflict, the American nuclear arsenal remained relatively small, with approximately 300 Mark 4 atomic bombs in the entire stockpile, all of them strategic in nature

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<sup>35</sup> JCS 87570, Department of the Army Staff Message Center from JCS to MacArthur, 31 Jul 50, Truman Presidential Library online, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/ki-22-24.pdf](http://trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/ki-22-24.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Mark A. Ryan, *Chinese Attitudes Toward Nuclear Weapons: China and the United States during the Korean War*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1989), 33-34.

<sup>37</sup> Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, 446

<sup>38</sup> Tannenwald, 119.

<sup>39</sup> Ryan, 25.



and reserved for use against the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Early in the Korean War, the administration faced a number of challenges in defining a role for nuclear weapons. Though the United States had no nuclear weapons dedicated to the tactical mission, Truman still tried to find some use for nuclear weapons in the Korean conflict. Elements of the administration could not form a consensus over what role nuclear weapons would play. Truman and the JCS quickly made nuclear weapons the central component in countering Soviet Air Force involvement. MacArthur wanted to use them against ground forces, even though the military's own findings found the Mark 4 atomic bomb was not suitable for ground combat.<sup>41</sup>

Publicly, the president dismissed the use of nuclear weapons, stating during a July 27 press conference that he was not considering using atomic weapons.<sup>42</sup> The administration, however, continued to quietly explore those situations where nuclear weapons could be employed. The two most likely scenarios involved using nuclear weapons to cover the evacuation of United Nations forces in the event of retreat, and, to counter the intervention by Chinese forces.<sup>43</sup> A review of options by the Office of Chinese Affairs also determined that if significant reinforcements could not be obtained to counter Chinese intervention, then strategic bombing of China, including the use of nuclear weapons would be necessary. The office further

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<sup>40</sup> Norman Polmar and Robert S. Norris, *The U.S. Nuclear Arsenal: A History of Weapons and Delivery Systems Since 1945*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009) 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Polmar and Norris, 39-40. In 1950, the US nuclear stockpile consisted entirely of Mark 4 bombs. These weapons were merely improved versions of the Mark 3 weapon used on Nagasaki in 1945. The Mark IV required ten hours to assemble and weighed over 4,500 kilograms, thus could only be carried by large bomber aircraft. These limitations prevented the Mark 4 from being deployed quickly enough to address rapidly changing battlefield situations.

<sup>42</sup> The American Presidency Project, "Harry S. Truman, The President's News Conference, July. 27, 1950," accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13673>.

<sup>43</sup> Ryan, 34-35.

concluded that chemical weapons should be used tactically against Chinese troops. The use of nuclear weapons, however, was not believed to be a deterrent to Soviet intervention.<sup>44</sup>

The administration's belief that China would be restrained by the Soviets from intervening had clearly reversed by November, and concerns were increasing that China, and even the Soviet Union, might intercede. A successful offensive into North Korea by United Nations forces could trigger a reaction from China or the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup> To offset Chinese intervention, Paul Nitze, the Director of Policy Planning, raised the prospect that nuclear weapons could be used tactically against strictly military targets. The director felt that nuclear weapons used in this manner would avoid large scale civilian casualties. Strategic attacks, he argued, contained the risk of high civilian casualties, and would assuredly bring about Soviet intervention.<sup>46</sup>

In spite of the risk of provoking Chinese intervention, the war was prosecuted under a United Nations resolution to unify Korea. Landings at Inchon, North Korea, on September 15, took the North Koreans by surprise. With a large enemy presence in their rear, the North Koreans retreated. By mid-October, United Nations forces had not only retaken South Korea, but occupied a majority of North Korea.<sup>47</sup> As United Nations forces drove north and approached the border between China and North Korea, they encountered increasing signs that the Chinese

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<sup>44</sup> Memorandum by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs, *FRUS*, Korea 1950, Vol VII, 1090-1091.

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum by Mr. John P. Davies of the Policy Planning Staff, November 17, 1950, *FRUS*, Korea 1950, Vol VII, 1180-1182.

<sup>46</sup> Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff, *FRUS*, 1950, Korea Vol. VII, 1041-1042.

<sup>47</sup> David Halberstam, *The Coldest Winter: American and the Korean War*, (New York: Hyperion, 2007), 344.

military had a significant presence in the area. MacArthur chose to dismiss concerns from both his subordinate officers and the White House warning of the threat of Chinese intervention.<sup>48</sup>

The administration's understanding by November was that nuclear weapons should only be used in militarily desperate situations, and even in such situations, there were few suitable targets for either tactical or strategic nuclear weapons in China. This understanding also included recognition that the international community looked upon nuclear weapons as "America's monster," and that using nuclear weapons in Korea would cost the US its moral position, grant the Soviets a propaganda victory and destroy United Nations unity in Korea. Any use of nuclear weapons, therefore, would have to include the approval of the United Nations, as well as the strength of will to endure the political consequences.<sup>49</sup>

### **The Korean War: Chinese Intervention**

On November 25, 1950, over 300,000 Communist Chinese troops conducted an offensive along the entire width of the Korean peninsula, achieving near total surprise against United Nations forces in Korea. Four days later, UN forces were ordered to fall back in full retreat.<sup>50</sup> The military situation was very grave. General Omar Bradley felt that UN forces would suffer a complete collapse by December 5, while Secretary of Defense General George Marshall

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 364-367, 377-380.

<sup>49</sup> "Memorandum by the Planning Advisor, Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Emmerson) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Rusk)", *FRUS*, 1950 Korea Vol. VII, 1098-1099.

<sup>50</sup> Halberstam, 402, 440-441.

discussed the possibility of a Dunkirk-style evacuation of all forces.<sup>51</sup> Truman now faced the very situation for which it was determined nuclear weapons were necessary for resolution. Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, dispatched to Korea to assess the situation with MacArthur, reported MacArthur's opinion that to save the United Nations in Korea, the US policy prohibiting attacks on China would have to change, and the utilization of nuclear weapons was a distinct possibility.<sup>52</sup>

It was in the midst of the growing crisis that Truman himself unwittingly unleashed a flurry of negative publicity over nuclear weapons. During a November 30 press conference addressing the crisis in Korea, a reporter asked Truman if atomic bombs would be used. His vague responses led to a series of questions about nuclear weapons, ending with Truman stating that nuclear weapons had always been a consideration.<sup>53</sup> Realizing the potential reaction to his statement, Truman's staff attempted to clarify that consideration did not mean utilization. It was too late, though, as there was an immediate outcry from both the American public and the international community.<sup>54</sup> England and the European nations led a vocal protest in the United

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<sup>51</sup> "Memorandum of Conversation, by the Ambassador at Large (Jessup) Supplement to Battle's Memorandum of December 3 recording with Secretary's conversation with the President, General Marshal and General Bradley" *FRUS*, 1950, Korea Vol. VII, 1312-1313.

<sup>52</sup> Acheson, 477.

<sup>53</sup> The American Presidency Project, "Harry S. Truman, The President's News Conference, Nov. 30, 1950," accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=13673>.

<sup>54</sup> Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs: Volume Two: Years of Trial and Hope*, (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday and Company, 1956), 395-396.

Nations, while most Asian and African nations followed suit. All argued that nuclear weapons in Korea had little military value and risked escalation with the Soviet Union.<sup>55</sup>

As a direct result of the president's statements, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee, with the full support of the British government, cabled Washington to request an immediate meeting over the situation, in which Truman agreed. Over the course of the December meeting, Attlee requested that the United States end its conflict with China and for Great Britain to have a participatory role in future considerations to use nuclear weapons. Truman was adamant that he would not commit the United States to any agreement limiting his authority to use nuclear weapons. The two leaders agreed to issue a communique stressing that they hoped nuclear weapons would not be needed, and that Truman would inform Attlee of American intentions.<sup>56</sup>

As the situation unfolded on the Korean peninsula, MacArthur desperately called for expanding military operations to include the Chinese mainland. Among his requests were for air attacks on the Chinese mainland, a naval blockade of China, more reinforcements, and nuclear strikes in North Korea. Upon hearing of Truman's remarks at the November press briefing, MacArthur quickly notified the Air Force Far East Commander, General George Stratemeyer, and presented a list of twenty-six desired targets for nuclear strikes within both China and the Soviet Union.<sup>57</sup> LeMay, though he believed the administration would not use nuclear weapons,

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<sup>55</sup> "Telegram from UN representative Warren R. Austin to the Secretary of State, December 1, 1950, received December 2, 1950", *FRUS* 1950 Vol VII 1300-1301. While a vast majority of nations opposed the use of nuclear weapons in Korea, Greece, Turkey and Saudi Arabia expressed their support for such action.

<sup>56</sup> Acheson, 481-484.

<sup>57</sup> George E. Stratemeyer, (edited by William T. Y'Blood). *The Three Wars of Lt. General George E. Stratemeyer: His Korean War Diary*, (Washington DC: Air Force History and Museums Program, 1999), 320-321.

ordered special radar units shipped to Korea to establish radar coverage of probable targets for atomic bombing.<sup>58</sup>

The JCS, however, had become concerned with what it thought was an increased chance of general war. The small size of the nuclear stockpile became a restricting factor on American military actions. Nuclear weapons were not to be used in Korea when they might be needed later should the conflict escalate. MacArthur received orders to conduct a fighting retreat on the Korean peninsula, with the goal of grinding down the Chinese offensive. The JCS felt they could stop the offensive and remain in Korea, but, should the military situation become dire, United Nations forces would be evacuated from the peninsula rather than engage in further escalation.<sup>59</sup>

The lack of tactical capability, the small size of the stockpile and the negative reactions from American allies forced the administration to conclude that nuclear weapons had no useful purpose in the Korean theater. As a result, United Nations forces had to rely on conventional military strength to stop the Chinese advance. It took nearly two months for Allied forces to stabilize the military situation. By the end of January, 1951, the Chinese advance had been halted, but not before China had retaken all of North Korea and the northernmost fifty miles of South Korea.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, 448-449.

<sup>59</sup> Acheson, 513-514.

<sup>60</sup> Halberstam, 483-484.

## **The Korean War: Final Nuclear Considerations**

Two months later, the Truman Administration, for the last time, gave serious consideration to the use of nuclear weapons in Korea. By early April 1951, United Nations forces had recaptured South Korea and pushed the Chinese back to the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.<sup>61</sup> The JCS was alarmed, however, by an apparent troop buildup in China, just north of the Chinese-North Korean border on the Yalu River. A request to transfer custody of nuclear weapons from the civilian Atomic Energy Commission to the military was forwarded to the president. Truman approved the transfer, but why he agreed to do so are not entirely clear, and some historians have proposed that the transfer was granted to solve a problem Truman had with MacArthur.

MacArthur had made controversial statements regarding Korea for several months, but during March of 1951, he had made several public comments disparaging of the American military leadership. According to Truman and Dean Acheson, this is the reason why he was removed from his command by Truman and the JCS on April 11.<sup>62</sup> Some historians, however, have identified the role the transfer of nuclear weapons played in securing MacArthur's dismissal. By giving the military custody of a few atomic bombs, Truman purchased cooperation from the JCS in relieving MacArthur of his command.<sup>63</sup>

The weapons that had been transported to Guam in July 1950 were transferred to military control on April 24. The understanding between field commanders in Korea and SAC was that

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<sup>61</sup> Cummings, 30-31.

<sup>62</sup> Acheson, 518-521.

<sup>63</sup> Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, 449-451; Tannenwald, 125

the weapons could not be used without a direct order from the JCS. By November, LeMay requested that the nine nuclear weapons be returned to the United States. Truman may have been willing to grant the military those weapons because he had already concluded, as he told Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Gordon Dean, that he would not use nuclear weapons in North Korea.<sup>64</sup> In the end, the only benefit Truman gained from nuclear weapons was the removal of the recalcitrant MacArthur.

For the rest of his term, Truman did not actively consider the use of nuclear weapons against the Chinese or North Koreans. The administration did, however, continue to seek new methods of using nuclear weapons through threats, if not actual utilization. Twice, once during 1951 and once during 1952, the administration considered or acted on threatening to use nuclear weapons against the Chinese and North Koreans in an effort to force those two nations to concede the war. In late 1951, the air force conducted Operation Hudson Harbor, using solitary B-29 bombers to conduct simulated nuclear attacks on North Korean cities. In addition to the intimidation value of such attacks, Operation Hudson Harbor was part of the JCS study of tactical nuclear weapons and determined there was a higher level of difficulty in using tactical nuclear weapons in Korea, concluding that such weapons would, most likely, have little military effect.<sup>65</sup> The second attempt at threatening nuclear attack was the product of the State Department. In 1952, the department proposed spreading rumors that the president was under

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<sup>64</sup> Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, 450.

<sup>65</sup> Cummings, 156-158.



tremendous domestic pressure to end the war and that nuclear weapons were his only option.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike Operation Hudson Harbor, the State Department plan was never implemented.

Historians seldom look at Truman's Korean War nuclear policy in the light of tactical nuclear doctrine. It could be reasoned that this is so because viable tactical weapons did not exist during the Truman Administration. A lack of hardware or doctrine, however, does not mean there was a lack of influence. What this chapter demonstrates is that the absence of tactical capability factored considerably into the Truman Administration's decision not to use nuclear weapons in the Korean theater of operations.

The evidence is clear that Truman and his advisors sought different ways in which they could employ nuclear weapons in Korea, including tactical applications. Deterrence, strategic applications against the Soviets and the Chinese, and tactical applications against the Chinese and North Koreans, were all considered within the first ten months of the war. Yet, by April 1952, the administration had eliminated actual use of nuclear weapons as an option and relegated nuclear policy in Korea to bluffing its way through empty threats via Operation Hudson Harbor.

The inability of the US military to effectively use tactical nuclear weapons impacted American policy in three distinct ways. First is the practical reason that the United States only had one model of nuclear weapon in its inventory through April, 1951. The Mark 4 atomic bomb was a purely strategic weapon which the JCS and the USAF had determined would fail if

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<sup>66</sup> "Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs (Phillips) to the Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Public Affairs (MacKnight) Washington, September 3, 1952" *FRUS* 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, Edward C. Keefer (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 484.

applied to direct battlefield use. The inventory did expand and grow more diverse as the war progressed, with the Mark 6 weapons entering into service by July, 1951, and the B5 bomb beginning production in May 1952.<sup>67</sup> By then, however, the Truman Administration had ruled out nuclear weapons use in Korea in order to preserve the international alliance.

Second, from the political and strategic viewpoints, using a weapons system that would fail to achieve its primary objectives would damage the reputation and credibility of that system, in this case nuclear weapons. The administration feared that failure of strategic nuclear weapons employed in the tactical role would significantly harm the value of these weapons as a strategic deterrent. It was better not to use those weapons and avoid highlighting their shortcomings, than to use them to no effect and damage their reputation in the international community as a strategic deterrent.

Third, in 1950 through 1951, the United States nuclear stockpile remained very small consisting of only three hundred weapons. The JCS worried that should Korea escalate into a larger conflict they would need all of those weapons for use against the Soviet Union. Using these weapons tactically in Korea, aside from not being effective, would also diminish the United States' ability to conduct nuclear operations against what the JCS perceived to be the more threatening enemy, the Soviets.

The three factors mentioned above, all stemming from the lack of tactical capability, provide the military logic for not using nuclear weapons in Korea. There also existed a strictly

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<sup>67</sup> Polmar and Norris, 40-41. The B5 bomb and the Mark 6 warhead were both considerably lighter than the Mark 4, had considerably less preparation time, and could be carried by single-engine attack aircraft, thus making their deployment more efficient and timely for tactical applications on the battlefield.

political logic that worked against using nuclear weapons. This logic originated from the overwhelming international resistance to nuclear weapons from America's allies. This resistance was so strong as to lead one ally, Great Britain, to actually seek to control American nuclear policy. While this attempt failed, it illustrated to Truman that nuclear weapons could endanger the political cohesion of the allied coalition in Korea. Keeping the United Nations military alliance together surpassed the military necessities on the Korean peninsula as a priority. Truman's decision to abandon Korea, if the UN military could not hold the peninsula, rather than use nuclear weapons in an attempt to save the situation, illustrates the high priority he held for keeping the alliance together.

Of the three administrations in this study, the Truman Administration represents a unique case in that the influence of tactical nuclear weapons in China policy stems from the non-existence of those very weapons. That the US nuclear inventory was exclusively strategic during the early days of the Korean War and that such weapons were unsuitable for battlefield use was a major factor for why nuclear weapons were not used. Though considered and explored by the Truman Administration, tactical nuclear weapons were ultimately removed from policy considerations. As the war progressed, the need to preserve the cooperation of American allies in Korea overtook the military considerations, so, when tactical weapons eventually became available toward the end of the Truman Administration, they were no longer an option. The height of reasoning against nuclear weapons occurred during December 1950 and January 1951, when the lack of tactical capability overlapped with the resounding and increasing international

outcry against nuclear weapons, combined to steer the Truman Administration to remove nuclear weapons from consideration, no matter how dire the situation in Korea.

## **CHAPTER TWO: EISENHOWER AND THE END OF THE KOREAN WAR**

By November 1952, the Korean War had lasted over twenty-nine months. The early optimism exhibited following MacArthur's surprisingly successful advances in October 1950 was lost when the Chinese entered the war and drove back United Nations forces. Since the Chinese intervention, the Korean front had changed little from the pre-war boundary between North and South Korea. The end of 1952, however, brought change in American leadership. The democrats lost the 1952 presidential election to Dwight Eisenhower, the former Allied Commander in Europe during World War Two. Eisenhower won a clear victory against his opponent, Adlai Stevenson, following the 1952 presidential campaign in which both anti-communism and the Korean War were major issues.<sup>68</sup> Eisenhower would oversee a fundamental shift in nuclear weapons policy by placing tactical nuclear weapons at the center of any given military situation between Communist China and the United States. The Korean War was the first of a series of crises with China during the Eisenhower Administration in which tactical nuclear weapons would become essential to policy.

Historians often focus their interpretations of Eisenhower policies on the strategic impact of nuclear weapons and their role in international policy. Joseph Gerson, for example, argues that the intent of Eisenhower's massive retaliation policy was to elevate any conflict to a

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<sup>68</sup> Presidential Campaigns and Elections, Overview and Chronologies: 1952, accessed April 18, 2016 <http://presidentialcampaignselectionsreference.wordpress.com/overviews/20th-century/1952-overview/> ; The American Presidency Project: Election of 1952, accessed April 18, 2016 <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1952> .

strategic level and use the United States nuclear arsenal as leverage against any potential adversary.<sup>69</sup> Kurt Gottfried and Bruce Blair direct their arguments entirely on Eisenhower's use of strategic nuclear weapons, the US relationship with the Soviet Union and the stabilizing effects of strategic nuclear weapons.<sup>70</sup> The research in this chapter will illustrate how tactical nuclear weapons rose in prominence as a policy tool for use against China, primarily through the defense of Korea. The president sought to use nuclear weapons to end a limited war against China, and not for deterrence. In considering the use of tactical nuclear weapons, Eisenhower found himself between American allies, who resisted the use of nuclear weapons, and the American military, which wanted to use nuclear weapons in a general war with China.

Unlike Truman, Eisenhower entered the presidency with a considerable amount of knowledge regarding nuclear weapons. He was first briefed on the atomic bomb in 1945 and its pending use against Japan. At that time, Eisenhower opposed using the weapon on the grounds that he believed Japan was already defeated and that such an action would shock the world and generate negative reactions aimed against the United States.<sup>71</sup> When he learned in 1948 that US nuclear readiness was lacking, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Eisenhower ordered increased preparedness training as well as streamlining the process of releasing nuclear weapons for deployment. In July 1949, as the Chief of Staff for the Army, Eisenhower was present when Truman announced that nuclear arms control would never work, and as a result, the United

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<sup>69</sup> Gerson, 78

<sup>70</sup> Kurt Gottfried and Bruce G. Blai, eds, *Crisis Stability and Nuclear War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13, 48.

<sup>71</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change 1953-1956*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1963), 312-313.

States would need to maintain an overwhelming superiority in nuclear weapons.<sup>72</sup> Finally, as the first commander of NATO, he was briefed by members of Cal-Tech's Project Vista about the possibilities of using tactical nuclear weapons for the defense of Europe.<sup>73</sup>

For Eisenhower, tactical nuclear weapons represented an element of what he called the economics of national security.<sup>74</sup> A nuclear armed military unit could project considerably more power and capability than an equivalent unit armed only with conventional weapons. This aspect made nuclear weapons militarily and economically superior to conventional weapons.<sup>75</sup> Eisenhower also recognized that the method of warfighting had changed, and he felt the methods used successfully during World War Two were no longer adequate in the post-war era. Allowing the enemy to overrun territory that could be liberated later was no longer an acceptable form of defense policy. In the event of war, all of a nation's combat assets would be committed, including atomic weapons.<sup>76</sup> Eisenhower would enter his presidency with a clear and distinct belief that nuclear weapons, particularly tactical weapons, represented a core element of the post-World War Two military.

Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, suggested that the key to ending the war lay in dealing directly with the Soviet Union. Dulles did not think of China as just another

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<sup>72</sup> Rhodes, *Dark Sun*, 320, 363.

<sup>73</sup> Kenneth Jerold Comfort, *National Security Policy and the Development of Tactical Nuclear Weapons: 1948-1958*, (Cohoes, NY: The Public Administration Institute of New York State, 2005), 61-62; Ryan, 150.

<sup>74</sup> Eisenhower Archives, speeches collection, CPX Conference, April 11, 1952, Paris, France, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all\\_about\\_ike/speeches/pre\\_presidential\\_speeches.pdf](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all_about_ike/speeches/pre_presidential_speeches.pdf) .

<sup>75</sup> Richard Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly: The Making of the Nuclear Arms Race*, (New York: Random House, 2007), 75.

<sup>76</sup> Eisenhower Archives, speeches collection, CPX Conference, April 11, 1952, Paris, France, accessed April 18, [http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all\\_about\\_ike/speeches/pre\\_presidential\\_speeches.pdf](http://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/all_about_ike/speeches/pre_presidential_speeches.pdf) .

satellite of the Soviet Union. “The Soviet Union cannot impose its will on Communist China in the same arbitrary way that it imposes its will on Poland or Rumania, etc,” Dulles wrote the president in late 1952. The secretary recognized that China relented to the Soviet Union by choice and felt that ending the conflict would rely not on addressing the local situation in Korea but on the overall situation in Southeast Asia. From Dulles’ perspective, the Korean War represented an opportunity for the Soviets to bog down American efforts and resources regionally, and even globally. Dulles also believed that re-unification of Korea under Rhee would not be practicable and that the post-war situation should revert back to the original boundaries of a divided Korea. Dulles advised Eisenhower to tell Rhee that re-unification of Korea was important to US interests, but that the US would never risk a third world war to achieve it.<sup>77</sup>

Further advice came from the former commander of United Nations forces in Korea, General Douglas MacArthur. He too argued that the US deal exclusively with the Soviets and negotiate to reunify not just Korea, but Germany under a popularly elected government, and to remove all foreign troops from Korea, Germany, Japan, and Austria. If these terms were not met, then the United States should use nuclear weapons to clear North Korea of North Korean and Chinese troops and to use radioactive fallout to render parts of Korea inhabitable. Additionally, China itself should be attacked in order to deprive it of its industrial base and

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<sup>77</sup> Memorandum to Eisenhower, Nov. 26, 1952. Box 8, Subject Series, John Foster Dulles Papers 1951-1959, Dwight D Eisenhower Presidential Library.



supply lines from the Soviets.<sup>78</sup> Eisenhower, in his memoirs, cited this letter to illustrate the necessity of using nuclear weapons if a major offensive were to be required to break the stalemate on the Korean peninsula.<sup>79</sup> At the end of 1952, however, the United States possessed a limited supply of tactical nuclear weapons, all of which had been deployed to Europe.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, MacArthur's proposal of what essentially amounted to establishing a permanent, radioactive wasteland in Korea goes far beyond tactical, or even strategic, battlefield necessity. Eisenhower only mentioned MacArthur's suggestion for the use of nuclear weapons, and omitted any reference to the use of fallout against the enemy.<sup>81</sup>

Eisenhower announced changes in Korean policy during his State of the Union address on February 2, 1953, beginning with the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet, which had been stationed between Taiwan and China since Truman ordered it there shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. According to Eisenhower, the presence of the fleet, originally deployed to stop a Chinese attack on Taiwan, and a Nationalist attack on China, served to protect China. The withdrawal of the fleet put the Chinese on notice that the war would either end or expand into China itself.<sup>82</sup> In coordination with the withdrawal of the Seventh Fleet, the USAF conducted one of its largest air raids against North Korea.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> A Memorandum on Ending the Korean War, General Douglas MacArthur December 14, 1952. Box 8, Subject Series, John Foster Dulles Papers 1951-1959, Dwight D Eisenhower Presidential Library. The other terms included the denunciation by both the US and the Soviets of war as a national policy. MacArthur also stated that immediate action was required before the US lost its technological lead in nuclear weapons to the Soviets.

<sup>79</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*, 180.

<sup>80</sup> Ryan, 149-150.

<sup>81</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*, 180.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>83</sup> Foot, 96-97.

## **The Korean War: Planning for the End**

In considering US actions to end the Korean War, Eisenhower quickly raised the prospect of using tactical nuclear weapons. One week after the State of the Union address, the president was informed of a troop buildup within the Kaesong sanctuary (established during previous armistice negotiations, the sanctuary was an area in which the allies agreed not to attack). General Mark Clark believed that this was a prelude to offensive operations by the Chinese. Secretary of State Dulles asked if it was time to no longer respect the boundaries of the sanctuary, which the president agreed. The president then elaborated that the military situation within the sanctuary provided an ideal situation to use tactical nuclear weapons. Dulles added that there were moral implications and restrictions on using nuclear weapons, explaining that the Soviets had successfully cast nuclear weapons as a separate category of weapon from conventional weapons and that the United States should try to “break down this false distinction.” The president then stated that if the Allies objected to the use of nuclear weapons, then perhaps they could contribute three more divisions to the Korean theater of operations.<sup>84</sup> During this meeting both the president and the secretary of state revealed a key element about their beliefs on the role of nuclear weapons in policy. That belief was that tactical applications for nuclear weapons bore no distinction from the tactical use of conventional weapons. Both

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<sup>84</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 131<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, February 11, 1953. *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 769.

men also recognized that the international community did not share this same belief, and that any policy decision using nuclear weapons would have to overcome this discrepancy.

As new weapon designs became operational and the nuclear stockpile grew, the military overcame its earlier concerns under Truman regarding the effectiveness of nuclear weapons and thoroughly endorsed the necessity of nuclear weapons for any attempt to expand the war outside of Korea. Two of the three attending generals at the March 27, NSC meeting, advocated for the use of nuclear weapons, with USAF General Hoyt Vandenberg stating that they would be most effective against Chinese bases in Manchuria. Only Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins dissented, questioning the effectiveness of nuclear weapons in Korea and pointing out that United States forces were vulnerable to nuclear attack both at Pusan and in Japan.<sup>85</sup>

General Collins' opinion represented a minority within the Eisenhower Administration. Even civilian advisors endorsed using nuclear weapons in Korea. An advisory committee created to review American options and explore the economic ramifications of US policy in Korea generally favored the use of nuclear weapons to end the Korean War. Members of the committee felt the American public would tolerate the use of nuclear weapons. Eisenhower was well aware that the opinions of American allies did not match those of his administration. Nor did he think that those opinions should be ignored, or that the United States should act unilaterally on the issue. The president felt that American allies had a right to be concerned, given that those allies, especially the European nations, thought of themselves as caught between

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<sup>85</sup> Memorandum of the Substance of Discussion at a Department of State-Joint Chiefs of Staff Meeting, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 817-818.

the United States and the Soviet Union. This attitude prohibited American use of nuclear weapons, and without nuclear weapons, the United States military options were severely limited. Both Eisenhower and Dulles agreed that the US needed to “make every effort to eliminate this attitude.”<sup>86</sup>

By May 1953, the administration had narrowed down its military choices for ending the Korean War to two options, with each option containing three separate methods of execution. The first option called for increased pressure on the Chinese and North Koreans within Korea. The second option increased pressure on the Chinese and North Koreans by expanding the war outside of the Korean peninsula. These options did not specifically mention the use of nuclear weapons, but an analysis conducted by the Central Intelligence Agency and the Intelligence Advisory Committee calculated that using nuclear weapons would demonstrate to the Chinese and Soviets the Western determination to prosecute the war to a conclusion. This by itself, the CIA felt, would not guarantee concessions from the Chinese. The intelligence service added that communist reaction to nuclear attack would depend on the amount of damage incurred from such attacks.<sup>87</sup>

As the NSC continued to address the Korean War, the president re-iterated his belief in the necessity of using nuclear weapons and the need to break down resistance to nuclear weapons. In early May, the president stated that he had reached the conclusion that the atomic

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 825-827

<sup>87</sup> SE-41 Probable Communist Reactions to Certain Possible UN/US Military Courses of Action with Respect to the Korean War, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 886-892.

bomb was simply another weapon in the American arsenal.<sup>88</sup> The military felt that operations outside Korea would require nuclear weapons, while the JCS stated that in order to be effective, the US would have to use several nuclear weapons, and that there were no good strategic targets within Korea. The president disagreed about targets in Korea, stating he was not convinced that the weapons would be ineffective. Discussion then centered on the reactions of American allies, with Eisenhower asking what would happen between the US and its Allies. Secretary Smith answered that NATA (North Atlantic Treaty Alliance) would “temporarily go to pieces,” but if the situation in Korea could be resolved and general war avoided, those relationships with other countries could be rebuilt. The president responded that the US needed its allies for defense and that he did not want these allies to desert the United States.<sup>89</sup> This, of course, placed Eisenhower in the same predicament as Truman. The president felt that nuclear weapons were necessary to end the war, but, by using nuclear weapons, the United States would lose the cooperation of its allies.

By the end of May, the JCS concluded if the war could not end through diplomatic efforts, then it would have to expand outside Korea. A key component of this expansion was the destruction of the entire Chinese air force. The president agreed and emphasized the necessity of expanding the war and that nuclear weapons were necessary in order to obtain a favorable end to the war. Expanding the war contained risks and Eisenhower worried that escalating the conflict

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<sup>88</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 143d Meeting of the National Security Council, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 975-979.

<sup>89</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 144<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 1012-1017.

would place Japan in a position vulnerable to Soviet attack, or that general war would break out between the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>90</sup> These concerns did not dissuade Eisenhower from his belief that nuclear action represented the best plan “if circumstances arose which would force the United States to expand the war.” The president suggested that May 1954 be set as the target date for increasing the military pressure on Korea and China.<sup>91</sup> But the war ended in July 1953, and the nuclear offensive was not needed.

There is a disparity between historians and Eisenhower over what influence nuclear weapons held in ending the Korean War. The president credited what he defined as a series of nuclear threats levied against China in the last days of May and the first days of June. According to Eisenhower, these threats were delivered discretely through diplomatic contacts in India; threats that Eisenhower claimed in his memoirs reached both the Chinese and Soviets.<sup>92</sup> John Foster Dulles, also made such an assertion in a 1956 interview with *Life* magazine, claiming to have expressed a nuclear threat to China in May 1953, transmitted by the leader of India, Jawaharlal Nehru.<sup>93</sup>

Evidence to support these assertions, however, has been lacking, or even refuted. Nehru, for example, denied any role in delivering a message from Dulles to the Chinese.<sup>94</sup> A message delivered by US ambassador Bohlen to the Soviets regarding the expansion of the war has been

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<sup>90</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 145<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea, Part 1, Vol. XV, 1064-1068.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*, 181.

<sup>93</sup> Soman, *Double-edged Sword*, 57.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

seen as too vague to carry a nuclear threat, and is interpreted more as a request of the Soviets to pressure China into ending the war.<sup>95</sup> Few historians give much credit to the threat of nuclear attack as more than a peripheral cause for the end of the Korean War.<sup>96</sup>

Instead of Eisenhower's nuclear threats, most historians cite the death of Stalin in March, 1953, followed by a change in Soviet policies as holding the most influence over the end of the war.<sup>97</sup> Other factors include deteriorating North Korean morale and the USAF strategic bombing campaign against North Korean cities.<sup>98</sup> Historian Rosemary Foot also identifies a perception amongst the Chinese leadership that Eisenhower's election represented a considerable shift in American policy toward a more aggressive stance against China.<sup>99</sup>

Threats of nuclear attack can come in various forms other than through diplomatic channels, and from the Chinese perspective, the United States appeared to be very belligerent with non-diplomatic nuclear threats throughout the war. During the Truman Administration, the air force conducted Operation Hudson Harbor, in which single aircraft flew unarmed bombing sorties over North Korean cities imitating the flight procedure for nuclear weapon delivery. During both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations, the United States engaged in extensive nuclear testing, much of which was both public and heavily involved in tactical development. Even while American policy makers discussed the merits of utilizing tactical

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<sup>95</sup> Dingman, 86.

<sup>96</sup> Foot, 95.

<sup>97</sup> Foot, 108-109.

<sup>98</sup> Matthew Jones, *After Hiroshima: The United States, Race and Nuclear Weapons in Asia*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 159.

<sup>99</sup> Foot, 111.

nuclear weapons in Korea, the national press made very public associations between the nuclear testing program and the potential for use on the Korean peninsula. The Chinese leadership paid close attention to these nuclear testing activities. Information from American nuclear tests alarmed the Chinese in that the rhetoric and publicity regarding the tests seemed to indicate the US was moving closer to using nuclear weapons on the battlefield, yet, the very same information revealed that certain precautions taken by the Chinese (fortification and troop dispersion) would help to protect ground forces from nuclear attack.<sup>100</sup>

The credibility of any nuclear threat hinges on the known ability to carry out such threats. US tactical capability remained limited throughout the Korean War. The much vaunted atomic cannon did not conduct its first test until May 25, 1953, and even then, was widely considered to be an ineffective weapons system. Furthermore, the few tactical nuclear bombs available were deployed to Europe, and therefore not available for use in Asia.<sup>101</sup> The Chinese government also felt that the threat of Soviet nuclear retaliation would restrain the United States.<sup>102</sup> The factors mentioned above helped to diminish the efficacy of nuclear threats from the United States. Chinese leadership did not consider an American nuclear attack a likely possibility, but instead feared an amphibious assault on mainland China as more probable.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ryan, 147-151.

<sup>101</sup> Ryan 148.

<sup>102</sup> Foot, 100.

<sup>103</sup> Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012) 80-81.



## **The New Look and Massive Retaliation**

During Eisenhower's first State of the Union address, he unveiled a new military policy designed to keep American armed forces modern and capable while still economical. The president reorganized the military's higher ranks and added the Secretary of the Treasury, the Director of the Budget and the Director of the United States Information Agency to the National Security Council. Admiral Arthur W. Radford was appointed as the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The focus on policy would build a military that Eisenhower described as "adequate" for the defense requirements of the United States, but without "extravagance."<sup>104</sup> The president saw technology as a means of keeping the US military a formidable force that could economically maintain national security and honor its overseas commitments. The Department of Defense would focus on the most modern weaponry in an effort to prevent the US military from falling behind in technical prowess.<sup>105</sup>

To reduce the extravagance of large, expensive militaries and provide the most efficient counterforce possible, nuclear weapons were to be incorporated into US strategy. Tactical nuclear weapons were widely believed to be effective at countering the extremely large armies fielded by the Soviet Union and China, thus they would be incorporated into divisional-level tactics of the army, a practice called the pentomic military. The prevailing thought behind tactical battlefield warfare dictated that ground armies would deploy smaller, mobile, nuclear-armed units. By relying on tactical nuclear weapons, the army's personnel requirements could

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<sup>104</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*, 450-452.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

be significantly reduced, in theory.<sup>106</sup> Since aerial delivery of nuclear weapons was the dominant means of deployment, the USAF was given modest increases in both money and personnel.<sup>107</sup> Because of the pentomic military, much of the budget cuts were directed at the army, which lost nearly a third of its funding in 1953, as well as reduction in personnel.<sup>108</sup>

Often associated with Eisenhower's military reform is the strategic doctrine of Massive Retaliation. The term originates from a speech by Secretary Dulles when he stated that the United States reserved the right to use nuclear weapons, at its discretion, for "massive retaliatory power" to counter Communist aggression throughout the world. Since that moment, historians have often tied the doctrine of Massive Retaliation with the military modernization policy of the New Look, stating that both were part of a strategic policy of deterrence aimed at the Soviet Union.<sup>109</sup> More recently, historians such as Campbell Craig have evolved an interpretation that Massive Retaliation was a policy of war avoidance that attached the risk of general war to any limited war scenario, the greatest effect being that the United States military was denied the ability to fight in small war situations.<sup>110</sup> This is the exact opposite of what some earlier historians such as Gerson argue, that by linking general war to limited war, the opponents of the United States would be "nuclear-blackmailed" into conceding the issue.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Comfort, 80.

<sup>107</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*. 452-453.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 452-453.

<sup>109</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, "JFD and Nuclear Weapons," in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, Richard H. Immerman, ed, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 49-55.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas, 413.

<sup>111</sup> Gerson, 78.

These interpretations are built on the assumption that all nuclear weapons are the same, and that there is no distinction within the role or missions of strategic or tactical nuclear weapons. As seen in this chapter and the next, President Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles clearly believed in a distinction between tactical and strategic weapons and this reflects in the actions and policies that were undertaken. The greatest consequence of Eisenhower's belief in the power of tactical weapons was the creation of the New Look policy and the pentomic military. The creation of the pentomic military represents the single-most influential factor behind the United States' subsequent nuclear threats against China because it made the pentomic military the only military option available to confront China.

Instead of a product designed to avoid war, the pentomic military was meant to assure that the United States military could successfully obtain its objectives, whether that be defense commitments, or in the case of Korea, preventing the loss of the Korean peninsula. Several times during the first months of 1953, Eisenhower, Dulles and a majority of the administration believed nuclear weapons were the only practical military solution available to the United States that would guarantee a successful outcome in a conflict with China over Korea. Both Eisenhower and Dulles preferred that nuclear weapons be used in a limited, tactical capacity, and conflicted with members of their administration that argued for strategic nuclear warfare against China.

## Preparing for a Second Korean War

In October, 1953, with the armistice only three months old, the administration was already considering its options should the cease-fire fail. Nuclear weapons were again recognized as a key and necessary component to any military action on the peninsula, either as a means of securing an evacuation of friendly forces or to halt a Chinese offensive. The concerns of the administration over using nuclear weapons in Korea echoed those previously mentioned during the war. Would the United States' allies understand the US position and the necessity for using nuclear weapons and would the Soviets respond with their own nuclear strikes in Korea and Japan? Though there had been no formal discussion with the United States allies on the use of nuclear weapons against China in a situation of renewed hostility, John Dulles felt the American allies would, in this case, understand the US position on using nuclear weapons.<sup>112</sup> Eisenhower had his reservations about the allies' acceptance of US nuclear policy and thought they had yet to "fully grasp the import of atomic warfare," even though, in his opinion, the American public had accepted the reality of nuclear war. Dulles' solution to overcoming allied

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<sup>112</sup> Memorandum of discussion at the 168<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, Oct. 29, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1571; NSC 167 U.S. Courses of Action in Korea in the Absence of an Acceptable Political Settlement, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1554; Memorandum of discussion at the 168<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, Oct. 29, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1571.

resistance to nuclear weapons was that the United States should share nuclear technology and weapons.<sup>113</sup>

The administration's concerns prompted contingency planning for a renewed Korean war. As part of that planning, Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson requested pre-authorization to use nuclear weapons should it be deemed necessary. The secretary also sought immediate permission to begin planning for a regional nuclear war in Southeast Asia, requesting a list of strategic targets in Manchuria.<sup>114</sup> While the JCS and Wilson may have thought the extensive use of nuclear weapons was a military necessity, there were dissenting opinions from the State Department.

After analyzing the JCS proposal, the Director of Policy Planning, Robert Richardson Bowie, criticized the JCS plan as too vague and worried that nuclear attacks on Manchuria would back the Soviets into nuclear retaliation against United Nations forces in Korea or Japan.<sup>115</sup> Secretary Dulles also raised his concerns with the JCS plan. The JCS plan for renewed warfare in Korea very much resembled the JCS plan for ending the stalemate earlier that year. That plan called for nuclear strikes on both tactical and strategic targets throughout Korea and mainland China. Dulles objected that the JSC plan involved general war with China, and even the Soviet

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<sup>113</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 179<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Friday, January 8, 1954. *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1704-1710.

<sup>114</sup> Memorandum by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (Wilson) Washington, Nov. 27, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1626-1629.

<sup>115</sup> Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Bowie) to the Secretary of State Washington, December 3, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1634-1636.

Union, the results of which would place the United States in an extremely isolated position with the rest of the world, as well as endangering a major US ally in the Pacific, Japan. The secretary also thought the JCS plan would have threatening implications for the French in Indochina. He felt the Chinese would send aid and personnel into that region to fight the French as a retaliatory measure against the United States.<sup>116</sup>

Dulles had his own plan for dealing with China, and it too, involved nuclear strikes. Unlike the JCS plan, however, Dulles' plan limited nuclear strikes to the Korean peninsula as well as the seizure of the offshore islands (including Hainan) and the blockade of the Chinese coast. The Secretary of State argued that what the JCS wanted was a "total victory" over China, and the JCS plan automatically assumed general war from the beginning. If fighting were to occur in Korea, Dulles wanted to fight for victory in Korea, not over China. Furthermore, Dulles saw dangers in the JCS plan, in allowing the military to decide before a crisis that it would fight a general war.<sup>117</sup> The secretary was also wary of Wilson's request for pre-delegation. He worried that a field commander would conduct a nuclear strike without presidential authorization. The president's response to these concerns was quite clear. Orders for nuclear strikes could only come from Washington, and not by a field commander. Eisenhower was adamant there would be limitations on the use of nuclear weapons. Such weapons would not be

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<sup>116</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 173d Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, December 3, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1636-1645.

<sup>117</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 173d Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, December 3, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1636-1645.

used for small incursions and border incidents, but would be reserved for a major attack by the Chinese.<sup>118</sup>

Eisenhower claimed not to have seen much difference between the JCS plan and Dulles' plan, just that the goals were different. The president focused his attention on not wanting to repeat the experience from a year earlier, when the military fought in Korea under several operational constraints such as restrictive rules of engagements and sanctuaries from attack. The JCS plan was much more aggressive and Eisenhower favored that one out of the two plans.<sup>119</sup>

This is a telling exchange within the NCS, and reveals much about Secretary Dulles' thinking regarding nuclear weapons. The State Department plan presented by Dulles used nuclear weapons, just as the JCS plan. The Dulles plan differed from the JCS plan by the considerable reduction of the nuclear deployment. Instead of extensive attacks on Korea and much of China, as the JCS envisaged, the Dulles plan limited nuclear strikes to the Korean peninsula alone. Even Dulles' employment of conventional forces left much of China untouched (with the exception of Hainan), resorting instead to seizing islands and blockading the coast.

The contingency planning for post-Korean War hostilities reveals again how Eisenhower believed that nuclear weapons represented the only option for confronting China without escalating a limited war scenario to general war. The discussion over these plans also revealed the conflict between the president and the US military regarding the intensity of any nuclear

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<sup>118</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 179<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Friday, January 8, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 Korea Volume XV, Part 2, eds John P. Glennon and Edward C. Keefer, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1984), 1704-1710.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

response. The military favored widespread strategic attacks geared toward general war. Eisenhower, along with Dulles, continued to favor a very limited application of nuclear weapons, essentially a tactical application, focused more on winning a brief, localized engagement and avoiding general war or retaliatory attacks against Japan or the French in Indochina. These discussions also illustrate the continuing struggle to cope with allied rejection of American nuclear policy. Though Eisenhower may have believed and wanted tactical nuclear weapons to be viewed as just another conventional weapon in the American inventory, he did not treat them as such, as seen by his refusal to allow pre-delegation for nuclear weapons use, and his insistence on maintaining tight control over when, where and how to use nuclear weapons.

Throughout the Korean War, outwardly, tactical nuclear weapons wielded little influence in military policy or ending the war. Behind the scenes, however, nuclear weapons dominated discussions on how to end the war, and afterwards on how to fight the Chinese in a renewed Korean War. Nuclear weapons presented a challenging dichotomy for the Eisenhower Administration. In the president's opinion, nuclear weapons were required for any successful military conclusion to the Korean War. Yet, using nuclear weapons threatened to destroy the allied alliance and risked general war with the Soviet Union. Acutely aware of allied attitudes against both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons, the administration found itself constrained far more by its allies than any technological issues, or even any reprisals from the Soviet Union.

Eisenhower refused to act against these attitudes, placing the cooperation of the allies over the military considerations for ending the war. The president deemed the political cost of using nuclear weapons too high. Having the European alliance "go to pieces" as Secretary Smith



described it, at the very moment when the United States could find itself fighting general war with the Soviet Union was a scenario Eisenhower refused to risk. As Eisenhower succinctly stated, the United States needed its allies, and refraining from using nuclear weapons and possibly extending the war for more than a year was the price for keeping those allies.

### **CHAPTER THREE: EISENHOWER FACES CRISIS AND CONFRONTATION IN THE TAIWAN STRAITS**

Historians, in general, define Eisenhower's nuclear policy in terms of strategic deterrence against a nuclear-armed Soviet Union. Even when tactical nuclear weapons are acknowledged, they are mostly placed in a context subordinate to strategic applications. Nina Tannenwald, for example, argues that the Eisenhower Administration's creation of the pentomic military, the incorporation of tactical weapons into military policy, the threat to use tactical nuclear weapons and the subsequent effort to convince the American people that nuclear weapons were no different than conventional weapons, was an attempt to generate support and credibility for a strategic policy of massive retaliation directed at the Soviet Union.<sup>120</sup> Instead, this chapter will demonstrate that Eisenhower's consideration to use nuclear weapons against China was derived from the combination of choices to contain China and the creation of the pentomic military. The ultimate goal in confronting China with nuclear weapons was to assert regional control over the Taiwan Straits area rather than for strategic factors directed at the Soviet Union.

#### **Laying the Groundwork for Nuclear Confrontation: Establishing a China Policy**

The Communist victory in the Chinese civil war and the rise of Mao-Zedong created a strong, centrally controlled government in China. The Eisenhower Administration felt the

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<sup>120</sup> Tannenwald, 40-41, 167.

Chinese government, acting under the heavy influence of nationalism and communism, would compel Communist China to eventually make attempts to reclaim historically Chinese territories that allies of the U.S. held or protected.<sup>121</sup> Concerned over the influence of China on the Asian continent, US policymakers believed that the United States would have to maintain a permanent presence in Asia.<sup>122</sup>

The relationship between the Soviet Union and China further complicated efforts to construct a policy. In 1950, Mao Zedong aligned the People's Republic of China with the Soviet Union, forming the Sino-Soviet Alliance. The president and Dulles knew that there was little common ideological ground between the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China. Furthermore, the president did not believe in the imminent threat of the Chinese being dominated by the Soviet Union.<sup>123</sup> Discord between the two nations represented the greatest threat to the Sino-Soviet alliance. The administration, however, believed that external threats to the two communist nations would override any internal issues between them and unify the two powers.<sup>124</sup>

The administration settled on a policy of bolstering the non-communist, Asian nations with economic, political and military aid in an effort to contain the expansion of Chinese influence. Additionally, the United States would actively seek opportunities to degrade and impair the Sino-Soviet alliance such as continuing non-recognition of the People's Republic of

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<sup>121</sup> NSC 166, Box 56, Disaster File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 2-3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Simei Qing, *From Allies to Enemies: Visions of Modernity, Identity and U.S.-China Diplomacy, 1945-1960*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 171-174.

<sup>124</sup> NSC 166, Box 56, Disaster File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, 7-8.

China in the United Nations while recognizing the Republic of China.<sup>125</sup> A mutual defense treaty was signed with South Korea in 1953, and in September, 1954, a mutual defense organization, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, was created. Furthermore, the United States and the Republic of China initiated the diplomatic process of creating a mutual defense treaty between the two nations.<sup>126</sup>

The decision to continue confrontation served as one of the most influential factors explaining why the Eisenhower Administration undertook active consideration to use nuclear weapons against China. The administration felt that easing China policy contained the risk of further conflict with Mao, while direct confrontation with China contained a high political and military cost. The middle road, containment built upon alliances, provided the most efficient and economical means of curbing Chinese influence in Asia. These alliances, however, required a military commitment from the United States. As seen earlier, Eisenhower had turned to nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons in particular, to make the US military a viable force for defending the United States and its allies. Reliance on tactical nuclear weapons meant that any military assistance to an ally, such as the Republic of China during its confrontation with the People's Republic of China, would involve the potential for nuclear war.

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<sup>125</sup>Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 117.

## **The First Taiwan Straits Crisis: Preparations**

When Chiang Kai-Shek retreated from mainland China and occupied Taiwan, the Nationalist military continued to hold a series of tiny islands located in and around the Taiwan Straits area. Known as the offshore islands, these islands consist of a series of separate and distinct archipelagos between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan. The archipelagoes most contested between the two sides were the island of Quemoy (of the Quemoy archipelago), the island of Matsu, and the archipelagos of the Dachen and the Penghus. Quemoy and Matsu are located very close to the Chinese mainland, especially Quemoy, which resides a mere seven kilometers from the mainland.<sup>127</sup> Chiang Kai-shek placed a high value on the islands for he hoped to use Quemoy as a jumping-off point in an attempt to retake mainland China.<sup>128</sup>

Washington preferred to have Chiang defend the islands himself.<sup>129</sup> The military was divided over the strategic importance of the offshore islands. In late July, 1953, the navy classified Quemoy and Matsu as militarily necessary to the Nationalists for the defense of Taiwan, while the Dachen were ruled unnecessary.<sup>130</sup> The JCS thought differently, and in an August, 1953 assessment, ruled that the islands were not required for the defense of Taiwan.

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<sup>127</sup> Global Security, Quemoy (Kinmen), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/taiwan/kinmen.htm> .

<sup>128</sup> Thomas, 154-155.

<sup>129</sup> Telegram, the Ambassador in the Republic of China (Rankin) to the Department of State Taipei, July 22, 1953 to Radford *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon and Harriet Schwar, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), 232.

<sup>130</sup> Telegram The Commander in Chief, Pacific (Stump), to the Chief of Naval Operations (Fechteler) July 23, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon and Harriet Schwar, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), 232.

There was universal agreement, however, that the islands possessed considerable political value and were indispensable to Nationalist morale.<sup>131</sup>

The administration worried that the offshore islands could become the center of a crisis. Ambassador to the Republic of China, Karl L. Rankin, in February 1954, expressed his concerns over not just the islands, but over the administration's Chinese policy as a whole. Regarding the islands, Rankin feared that the PRC could use the islands to test the United States' retaliation policy. The ambassador felt he had received little information regarding Chinese policy as well as feared that eventually, Chiang would attack the mainland, and that the PRC would exploit the issues between the Republic of China and the United States.<sup>132</sup> The CIA also identified the offshore islands as a point through which the PRC could provoke the United States. In its March National Intelligence Estimate, Communist China was predicted to conduct raids on the offshore islands, but that its primary efforts against the United States and Taiwan would be economic and political.<sup>133</sup>

By the summer of 1954, the administration's concerns grew to the point that Eisenhower and the NSA sought to take pre-emptive actions to discourage Chinese attempts to exploit the islands. Early in June, the president approved a plan that a small portion of the Navy's Seventh

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<sup>131</sup> Memorandum by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Johnson) to the Acting Secretary of State, August 3, 1953, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon and Harriet Schwar, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), 240-241.

<sup>132</sup> Rankin to the Deputy Assistant Sec. of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Dumright) Feb. 20, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon and Harriet Schwar, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), 362-364.

<sup>133</sup> National Intelligence Estimate - Communist Courses of Action in Asia through Mid-1955, March 15, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, eds John P. Glennon, David W. Mabon and Harriet Schwar, (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1985), 389-396.

Fleet would visit the Dachen Islands, an action specifically intended to communicate to the People's Republic of China the United States' concern regarding the offshore islands.<sup>134</sup> During the August 18 NSC meeting, both China policy and the offshore islands were discussed. Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Robert Cutler asked if the United States should extend the parameters of U.S. obligation to defend offshore islands outside the Pescadores (Penghus). The opinion of the JCS was that all the Nationalist-held islands should be held. Chairman of the JCS, Admiral Arthur Radford felt that the United States "could not afford to lose any more ground in the Far East." Eisenhower's position was that the United States should "go as far as possible to defend them without inflaming world opinion against us." The Department of Defense was directed to deliver a report by September 29 on U.S. options should Communist China attack any of the offshore islands.<sup>135</sup>

An assessment of American policy regarding the offshore islands was compiled by the State Department on August 20, which determined that the United States was not officially committed to defending the islands. Nor had the Eisenhower Administration, up to that date, taken an official stance on the islands. The only official actions taken were the visitation of members of the Seventh Fleet, once in May, and again on August 19 of that year.<sup>136</sup> Less than a

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<sup>134</sup> Memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, June 4, 1954, RG273, Official Meeting Minutes (200-210), Entry 5, Box 11, Records of the National Security Council, National Archives, College Park, MD.

<sup>135</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 112<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington August 18, 1954 *FRUS*, China and Japan, Vol. XIV, Part 1, 526-540.

<sup>136</sup> Memorandum by Harry H. Schwartz of the Policy Planning Staff to the Director of the Staff (Bowie). *FRUS*, China and Japan, 1952-1954 Vol. XIV, Part 1, 543-544.

week later, Dulles issued a statement warning China of possible US action should the offshores be attacked.<sup>137</sup>

Just days after the Seventh fleet visited the Dachen, the Taiwanese government reiterated its concerns over PRC attacks against the offshore islands. Though Chiang had mentioned the islands before, concern this time coincided with a series of statements from the PRC calling for the liberation of Taiwan.<sup>138</sup> During the month of August, Chiang Kai-Shek moved 58,000 troops to Quemoy Island and 15,000 troops to Matsu, instantly raising the stakes of any crisis over the offshore islands.<sup>139</sup> Toward the end of August, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden relayed his concerns through the British embassy that the West faced losing more prestige over the offshore islands. Apparently worried over the French failure to defeat communist forces in Indochina, the prime minister stated that England would support a strong military stand over the islands, but cautioned that such a policy should be flexible in order to avoid committing the United States to permanently defending the islands.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Gordon H. Chang, and He Di, "The Absence of War in the US-China Confrontation over Quemoy and Matsu in 1954-1955: Contingency, Luck and Deterrence," *The American Historical Review* 98 no. 5 (Dec., 1993): 1505.

<sup>138</sup> The Charge in the Republic of China (Cochran) to the Department of State. *FRUS*, 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV, Part 1, 550.

<sup>139</sup> Global Security, First Taiwan strait Crisis, accessed April 18, 2016  
[http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/quemoy\\_matsu.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/quemoy_matsu.htm).

<sup>140</sup> Memorandum for the Record, by Morris Draper, Jr., of the Reports and Operations Staff, Executive Secretariat. *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 554.



### **The First Crisis: Hostilities Begin**

On September 3, 1954 China initiated an artillery barrage against the main island of the Quemoy archipelago. The United States gauged Chinese motivations for the attack as ranging from a full scale invasion of Taiwan, an invasion of the offshore islands, or a test of American policy. During the first few days of the crisis, the administration struggled to determine the actual intent of the shelling. Rankin reported that there was risk of an imminent attack on Quemoy, and the JCS certainly did little to discount that possibility.<sup>141</sup> The intelligence community, however, stood by their original pre-crisis assessment that the People's Republic of China was testing American policy.<sup>142</sup>

The majority of the JCS considered the islands "important but not essential" to the defense of Taiwan while the minority opinion advocated active participation in the defense of ten offshore islands, including Quemoy. The JCS was again in agreement that the offshore islands' political value outweighed any military value (or lack, thereof) and for that reason, the islands might have to be defended, regardless of their lack of military importance. Military action to protect Quemoy, in the opinion of the JCS, would require military action against mainland China.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE-100-4/1-54, The Situation with Respect to Certain Islands off the Coast of Mainland China, Washington, Sept. 10, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 563-571.

<sup>142</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE-100-4-54, The Situation with Respect to Certain Islands off the Coast of Mainland China, Washington, Sept. 4, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 563-571.

<sup>143</sup> Memorandum prepared by the Secretary of State, Washington, September 12, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, p-611.

Dulles, too, believed Quemoy should be defended. The secretary was in Manila for a SEATO organizational meeting and wired back to the United States expressing his opinion that the island should be defended with American aid, but only if the U.S. deemed it feasible. The secretary thought the situation in Quemoy could turn into another Dien Bien Phu, where the French suffered a humiliating and devastating defeat at the hands of communist forces in Indochina. Dulles saw an opportunity to reverse the prestige gained by Communist China if Quemoy could be held.<sup>144</sup>

Prestige or the loss of prestige for the US should the islands fall to the Chinese, was a driving element of the crisis. The president, then in Denver, recognized and identified the critical role of the islands in maintaining US prestige during a phone briefing with the Under-Secretary of State, General Walter Bedell Smith. Much of the administration agreed with the CIA's assessment of Chinese motivation for attacking the island, that Mao was probing American resolve over Taiwan and the offshore islands. Lack of action on behalf of the United States, according to the CIA, could lead the People's Republic of China to proceed with actual assaults on one or more of the offshore islands.<sup>145</sup>

The first indication of Soviet reaction over the incident occurred early in October, when Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev spoke from Beijing supporting the Chinese. The administration, however, dismissed the possibility of the Soviets going to great lengths to

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<sup>144</sup> Telegram 793.5/9-554 The Secretary of State to the Department of State, Manila, September 5, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 572.

<sup>145</sup> Special National Intelligence Estimate SNIE-100-4-54 The Situation with Respect to Certain Islands off the Coast of Mainland China, Washington, Sept. 4, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 563-571.

confront the US over the offshore islands. The American ambassador to the Soviet Union, Charles E. Bohlen, cabled the day after Khrushchev's speech stating that he did not think the Soviets were ready to risk war over the People's Republic of China or the offshore islands, but also warned not to take the premier's statements lightly.<sup>146</sup> John Dulles agreed, calling Khrushchev's statements "bluster."<sup>147</sup>

The administration devised a diplomatic effort, to be initiated in the United Nations by New Zealand, to demilitarize the islands. Eisenhower, Dulles, other administration members, as well as the administrations of New Zealand and Great Britain all felt China would reject any proposal that kept the offshore islands out of reach. Equally as disruptive to the proposal was Chiang's refusal to abandon the islands. All parties involved counted on the Mao's rejection of the proposal, its real intent to give the United States the moral high ground in the crisis, should hostilities erupt between the US and China.<sup>148</sup>

While the State Department pursued the New Zealand proposal, work on the mutual defense treaty with the Republic of China moved forward. The treaty was signed between the United States and the Republic of China on December 2, 1954. The provisions of the treaty included the defense of Taiwan and the Pescadores (Penghus) and included an ambiguous clause covering any territory held by the Nationalists and considered strategically important by both

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<sup>146</sup> Telegram 793.00/10-254, The Ambassador in the Soviet Union (Bohlen) to the Department of State Oct. 2, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 674.

<sup>147</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 216<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, Oct. 6, 1954, *FRUS* 1952 China and Japan, Volume XIV Part 1, 689-701.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

signatory nations.<sup>149</sup> The Nationalists had tried to include most of the offshore islands in the protective sphere, but the United States would not agree to it.<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, the US and the Republic of China agreed that any major action against the PRC required consultation and approval from the United States.<sup>151</sup>

In December, Eisenhower advised the Nationalists against placing more troops on the offshore islands.<sup>152</sup> One month later, communist Chinese forces seized the offshore island of Yijiangshan, near the Dachen, on January 18, 1955. The next day, Eisenhower presented a plan to Congress that evacuated the Dachen, but added Quemoy and Matsu to the American defense perimeter.<sup>153</sup> Eight days later, Congress passed the Formosa Resolution, granting the president the right to use force to defend Taiwan, the Pescadores and any related positions currently held by the Nationalists.<sup>154</sup> The imprecise nature of the resolution gave Eisenhower the leeway to choose if and when to defend the offshore islands. The US Navy helped to evacuate the Dachen, and by mid-February, Communist China occupied the island chain.<sup>155</sup>

At this point, Eisenhower's China and military policy decisions brought the United States to the point of actively considering nuclear attacks against China. The United States alliance

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<sup>149</sup> Yale Law School, Lillian Goldman Law Library, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/chin001.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/chin001.asp).

<sup>150</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director of the Office of Chinese Affairs (McConaughy) Washington, November, 19, 1954, *FRUS*, 1952-1954 China Vol. XIV, Part 1, 904

<sup>151</sup> Memorandum from the Commander, U.S. Taiwan Defense Command (Smoot) to the Chief of General Staff, Republic of China (Wang), Sept. 4, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, China Vol. XIX, 128.

<sup>152</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Mandate for Change*, 466.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 469-470. The Dachen were evacuated on February 4 and the Chinese occupied the islands two weeks later.

<sup>154</sup> Michael M. Sheng, "Mao and China's Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Strait Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split," *Modern China* 34 no. 4 (Oct., 2008): 485.

<sup>155</sup> Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 124.

with the Republic of China, particularly the mutual defense treaty, made the Chinese Civil War a part of American military policy. The doctrine behind the pentomic military required the active planning, if not actual use, of nuclear weapons for any given situation. Since nuclear weapons had been integrated into all military operations, no other alternative could have been utilized. Admiral Radford explained the US position during the March 10, NSC meeting, “(It was the) JCS position that nuclear weapons would always have to be used. Our whole military structure is built around this assumption.”<sup>156</sup>

Nuclear weapons were deployed to the Far East theater in response to the crisis, and were integrated into military response planning.<sup>157</sup> The JCS ordered the SAC to begin selecting targets in China.<sup>158</sup> The official rules of engagement during those later stages of the crisis included a retaliatory nuclear strike option. Eisenhower placed an exclusive restriction on this option, however, prohibiting its use without specific orders from the president himself.<sup>159</sup> As the president had stated before, field commanders would not make nuclear strike decisions.

Controlling nuclear weapons was just one aspect of nuclear policy that the president and the military would clash over. The JCS favored military action on a strategic scale. Both Dulles

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<sup>156</sup> Memorandum of Discussion at the 240<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, March 10, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957 China, Vol. II, 345-350 no. 146.

<sup>157</sup> Telegram from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Radford) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Stump) Washington, January 29, 1955, *FRUS* 1955-1957 China, Vol. II, 164-165. The actual plan is not included in *FRUS*, but specific reference to the plan, including options for nuclear retaliation to Chinese attacks on American forces is found in the JCS telegram.

<sup>158</sup> Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 127.

<sup>159</sup> Memorandum for the Record, by the President's Special Assistant (Cutler), March 11, 1955. *FRUS*, 1955-1957 China, Vol. II, 355-360. During a briefing with Cutler on March 11, 1955, the president specifically reviewed the nuclear use component of NSC 162/2 and mentioned that the nuclear use policy did not allow for pre-authorization to utilize nuclear weapons.

and Eisenhower believed that any military operation to protect Quemoy, or any of the offshore islands, required tactical nuclear weapons. The two felt that only the limited application of nuclear weapons was all that was necessary. Dulles would go so far as to specifically state that strategic weapons, or what he called weapons of mass destruction, were not necessary for confronting China.<sup>160</sup>

While the Eisenhower Administration grappled with potential war with China over the straits, China would make the first move to end the crisis. During the Bandung Afro-Asian Conference in April, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai publically stated that China did not want war with the United States. Eisenhower took advantage of the opportunity, and the United States and China entered into the Geneva talks, a series of ambassadorial meetings to discuss the repatriation of nationals and open dialogue with the intention of forestalling future crisis.<sup>161</sup>

### **The First Crisis: An Assessment**

The causes and resolution of the First Taiwan Straits Crisis remains a debated subject amongst historians. Many focus on the ambiguity of Eisenhower's policies, which made no straightforward commitment either to goals or specific actions. As late as August, 1954, the administration did not make public any intention to defend the offshore islands. This ambiguity

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<sup>160</sup> Memorandum of a conversation Between the President and the Secretary of State, Washington, March 6, 1955 *FRUS* 1955-1957 China, Vol. II, 336-337.

<sup>161</sup> The Taiwan Straits Crises 1954-1955 and 1958, US Department of State, Office of the Historian online under Milestone: 1953-1960, accessed April 18, 2016, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/taiwan-strait-crises> ; Summary of The Views of Afro-Asian Countries on The Taiwan Issue At The Afro-Asian Conference, Wilson Center Digital Archive, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114694> .

and lack of vocal commitment, according to Gordon Chang and He Di, had the complete opposite effect of deterrence and actually encouraged Mao Zedong to continue with operations against the Dachen as well as the artillery attacks against Quemoy.<sup>162</sup> Countering opinions, such as those of Michael M. Sheng, blame Mao Zedong for underestimating the US commitment to defend the Republic of China and for taking actions that reinforced opinions in Washington about the aggressiveness of China.<sup>163</sup>

Historian H.W. Brands is particularly critical of Eisenhower's reliance on nuclear weapons during the straits crisis. According to Brands, Eisenhower's policy of Massive Retaliation drove the United States to risk what Brands called national suicide (through escalation) over interests of limited or no value, such as the offshore islands. Brands characterizes Eisenhower's decision making process as a hands-off procrastination, where Eisenhower waited for events during the Taiwan Straits' crises to determine the use, or non-use, of nuclear weapons, rather than making the decision before such crises occurred.<sup>164</sup>

The decision to defend the offshore islands was driven by fear of the consequences to American prestige should the islands fall to China. This fear is best illustrated by the administration's repeated concerns that the offshore islands could devolve into a repeat of the humiliating loss of the French at Bien Dien Phu. The administration felt that the loss of the offshore islands could initiate a chain of events leading to the possible loss of Taiwan, thus

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<sup>162</sup> Chang and Di, 1511-1514.

<sup>163</sup> Sheng, 494-495.

<sup>164</sup> H.W. Brands. "The Age of Vulnerability: Eisenhower and the National Insecurity State," *The American Historical Review* 94 No.4 (Oct. 1989): 963-989.

severely damaging the United States' reputation as an ally in the Asian region. Loss of prestige as an ally could embolden Communist China to continue to challenge the US in Asia. In the eyes of the Eisenhower Administration, therefore, China would have to be confronted over the Taiwan Straits, otherwise, Communist China would increase its level of hostility toward the United States.

Once the decision to defend the islands had been made, then the second component of Eisenhower's policies wielded its influence. By defending the islands, the administration had committed to utilizing the military. In 1954, the pentomic divisional structure was still being implemented, but advanced enough along its development that no non-nuclear option was available. Once committed to defending the offshore islands, the US nuclear element had become the only considered military option for resolving the crisis.

There is much more agreement amongst historians that US nuclear policy played little part in resolving the crisis. Since China did not intend to take Quemoy or Matsu, then nuclear weapons could not have acted as a deterrent to Chinese expansion.<sup>165</sup> Jian Chen also argues that Mao's goal in the crisis was to emphasize to the world that the situation between China and Taiwan was a domestic issue, not an international one, and to protest the mutual defense treaty between the US and Taiwan.<sup>166</sup> T.V. Paul argues the role of nuclear weapons in the crisis was diminished because there was no credibility behind the nuclear threats.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Chang and Di, 1523.

<sup>166</sup> Chen, 168-169.

<sup>167</sup> T.V. Paul, *The Tradition of Non-Use of Nuclear Weapons*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 55.



The decision to protect American prestige would certainly be called a strategic consideration, but the military options to protect the offshore islands were clearly aimed to be limited regionally. The lack of concern over the Soviet Union's reaction to events in the Taiwan Straits, and the open dismissal of any potential action by the Soviets, indicates that the Eisenhower Administration was not worried that the strategic disposition between the US and the Soviet Union would change over US actions in the Taiwan Straits.

For the Eisenhower Administration, tactical nuclear weapons assured military goals could be successfully obtained. On repeated occasions before and during the crisis, the administration felt that only nuclear weapons could defend United States interests. Only nuclear weapons could protect South Korea from a renewed conflict on the Korean peninsula. Only nuclear weapons could protect Taiwan and the offshore islands from Chinese invasion. Tactical nuclear weapons allowed the United States to retain the capability of direct military confrontation, should the administration choose that option.

The crisis further illustrated the difference of opinion between Eisenhower, Dulles and the US military over the nature of nuclear weapons in American policy. The US military thought of nuclear weapons as a weapon to win general war, in this case, overwhelming strategic defeat of China. The possibility that the US would fight a limited war, for limited goals, seemed to escape most of the military leadership. For Eisenhower and Dulles, however, tactical nuclear weapons were a means of achieving regional goals within limited war by applying just enough force to defeat the Chinese in and around Taiwan and the offshore islands.

## Between the Crises

In the years between the first and second straits crises, the Eisenhower Administration continued to develop the pentomic military. In the eyes of the administration, the development and integration of tactical nuclear weapons considerably improved the capability of the US military, and tactical nuclear weapons were distributed around the world, particularly to Europe, Asia and the West Pacific.<sup>168</sup> Nuclear weapons deployments in Asia rivaled those in Europe. Regulus nuclear missiles were dispatched to Guam between September and November, 1957.<sup>169</sup> In January, 1958, the USAF's 17<sup>th</sup> Tactical Missile Squadron, using Matador missiles armed with nuclear warheads, arrived in Taiwan. In December, the 310<sup>th</sup> Tactical Missile Squadron deployed similarly-armed Matadors in South Korea.<sup>170</sup> Honest John nuclear missiles, eight-inch nuclear howitzer ordinance and the 280mm atomic cannon were also deployed to South Korea.<sup>171</sup> During the months of March and April, the United States conducted joint exercises with the Republic of China involving live-firing of Matador missiles.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Memorandum for the President, April 17, 1956, Box 29, Administration Series, Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. This explains that the US military has improved considerably as a result of the development and integration of tactical nuclear warheads.

<sup>169</sup> History of the Custody of Nuclear Weapons (U) July 1945 through September 1977, NSArchive, George Washington University, online, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb442/docs/doc%201A%20custody%20and%20deployment%20history%2078.pdf>.

<sup>170</sup> George Mindling and Robert Bolton, *U.S. Air Force Tactical Missiles: 1949-1969 – The Pioneers*. (Morrisville, NC: Lulu.com publishing, 2011), 144.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>172</sup> Appu K. Soman, "Who's Daddy" in the Taiwan Strait? The Offshore Islands Crisis of 1958," *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 3 no. 4 (Winter, 1994): 377.

Nuclear cooperation with England, a carryover from the Bermuda conference, evolved to include the development of separate strategic and tactical planning agreements between the United States and Great Britain.<sup>173</sup> The United States continued to conduct nuclear testing to improve and develop both strategic and tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>174</sup> Between 1955 and 1957, the United States conducted 145 nuclear test shots. The vast majority of these tests, 131, involved weapons development as opposed to civil defense engineering or peaceful applications of nuclear explosives.<sup>175</sup>

In addition to the nuclear deployments, meant to act as a deterrent to China, the administration sought to minimize the risk of Chiang stationing large numbers of troops on the offshore islands and undertook an effort to convince Chiang to abandon them. In April, 1955, Admiral Radford and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter Robinson were dispatched to Taiwan with the goal of persuading Chiang Kai-Shek to at least reduce the number of Nationalist forces stationed on the offshore islands. Not only did Chiang refuse, but in July, he moved an additional army division to Quemoy. Later, over the objections of the United States

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<sup>173</sup> Report to the President and the Prime Minister, and-United Kingdom Procedures Prior to Action by Nuclear Retaliatory Forces based in the United Kingdom, Box 4, Administration Series, Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library. This report identifies two separate methods of retaliation, strategic and tactical. The report stipulates that the president and the Prime Minister would consult before issuing a joint decision on a commitment to attack. A Strategic warning based on intelligence indicating a future attack and a tactical warning that an attack is underway or imminent. The tactical warning allowed for nuclear forces to proceed with deployment up to a specific point, and then await further orders from above.

<sup>174</sup> Aug. 2, 1957 letter from L. Strauss to DDE, regarding Operation Hardtack and Aug. 7, 1957 letter from L. Strauss explaining need for additional resources for Operation Plumbbob, Box 4, Administration Series, Ann Whitman File, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

<sup>175</sup> *United States Nuclear Tests: July 1945 through September 1992 DOE/NV-209-REV 15*. (Washington D.C. U.S. Department of Energy, Office of Scientific and Technical Information, 1994), 2-10.

Military Assistance and Advisory Group, he increased the Nationalist presence on the island of Quemoy to 85,000 military personnel.<sup>176</sup>

### **The Second Crisis: Preparing for Crisis and Confrontation**

On August 23, 1958, the Chinese army commenced an artillery bombardment of Quemoy Island, thus starting a second crisis in the Taiwan Straits region. Unlike the first crisis, this one involved a US military that had fully implemented the pentomic military program. As a result, considerations for nuclear warfare against China were at their most intense than in any previous engagement in Asia.

As seen in the CIA's analysis of the first Straits Crisis, the Eisenhower Administration was very much aware that Chiang's refusal to abandon the islands placed the initiative for any future action toward the islands with the PRC. The US commitment to defend Taiwan and the offshore islands meant that China could provoke an incident at any time of its choosing. This situation forced the United States to factor the offshore islands into US policy planning. To monitor the situation in the Taiwan straits, the USAF conducted a series of reconnaissance flights both by Republic of China aircraft and US aircraft over the Chinese coast.

The first of these flights, using Nationalist pilots trained in the US, began in December, 1957. Four flights by Republic of China aircraft were flown, with the fourth shot down by PLAAF fighter aircraft. The US itself flew two U-2 flights over eastern China, the last flight on

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<sup>176</sup> Soman, Appu K. "Who's Daddy...", 376.

June 18, 1958. These flights were looking for signs of Chinese preparations to invade the offshore islands or Taiwan itself. No such preparations were seen during these flights.<sup>177</sup> On July 17, though, Mao Zedong made the decision to begin shelling Quemoy. Fighter units of the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) were moved to the coast during the final weeks of July.<sup>178</sup> At the same time, Republic of China and PLAAF aircraft engaged in a series of dogfights over the straits area.<sup>179</sup> On August 20, Mao committed to the straits operation, set to begin on August 23.<sup>180</sup>

The movement of the fighter aircraft did not escape notice by the United States, most likely detected by a U-2 mission flown on July 20. The State Department quickly suggested that the US alleviate any worries the Nationalists might have over the PLAAF fighter deployment. As far as the State Department was concerned, the deployment did not indicate the prelude to major offensive action against the offshore islands.<sup>181</sup> Chiang Kai-shek disagreed with the state department assessment and insisted that the US had not realized the true danger of an imminent PRC attack on the islands.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Curtis Peebles, *Shadow Flights: America's Secret Air War Against the Soviet Union*, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, Inc., 2000), 215-218.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 218-219

<sup>179</sup> M.H. Halperin, "Memorandum RM-4900-ISA, December 1966, The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis: A Documented History" (abridged), Department of Defense. The RAND Corporation website, accessed April 18, 2016, [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_memoranda/RM4900.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4900.html) .

<sup>180</sup> Peebles, 218-219.

<sup>181</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the Republic of China, Washington, August 2, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960 Volume XIX China, eds Harriet Dashiell Schwar, Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 39.

<sup>182</sup> Telegram from the Commander, U.S. Taiwan Defense Command (Smoot) to the Commander in Chief, Pacific (Stump) August 4, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960 Volume XIX China, eds Harriet Dashiell Schwar, Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 39.

In spite of Chiang's pleas for increased assistance and direct action by the United States, the State Department never thought China would attack Taiwan, believing the Chinese realized that such action would guarantee US involvement. As with the previous crisis, the State Department identified that aggressive Nationalist actions would give the PRC a tremendous propaganda advantage. The State Department also thought China might exert pressure on the offshore islands while trying to avoid direct US action. Such an action would force the US to act or the offshore islands would be placed in a situation as to "wither on the vine."<sup>183</sup>

Dulles felt that it was time the US incorporated the islands into the defensive sphere protected by the US military, reasoning that Chiang Kai-Shek had already integrated them into a vital component of Taiwanese defense (by stationing a large contingent of troops). Eisenhower, however, still recognized that the islands posed no military value, but only had worth in preserving the morale of the Nationalists.<sup>184</sup> The president was well aware that Chiang Kai-shek's deployment of 100,000 troops on the islands placed the United States in a difficult position, essentially forcing US policy to become dependent on the actions of the PRC. The president saw the situation as a "war of nerves," and was cognizant that a potential for general war existed. Inaction on the islands situation, Eisenhower felt, risked creating a condition leading to war.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, Taipei, August 7, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960 Volume XIX China, eds Harriet Dashiell Schwar, Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 40.

<sup>184</sup> Memorandum of Conference with President Eisenhower, Washington, August 12, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960 Volume XIX China, eds Harriet Dashiell Schwar, Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 50.

<sup>185</sup> Memorandum for the Record, Washington, August 14, 1958, group meeting with DDE, VP, Acting Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Treasury, Office of Defense and Mobilization, Deputy Secretary of

While refusing to commit US forces to defend the islands, the administration still took several actions to mitigate the risks of potential PRC action in the Taiwan Straits. The US dispatched air force units to Taiwan, and the US Air Force was in the midst of formulating a plan to organize and deploy a composite air strike unit, comprised of both nuclear and conventional tactical aircraft, to Taiwan.<sup>186</sup> A near unanimous decision by the president's cabinet approved using nuclear weapons to prevent China from isolating or attacking the offshore islands. The early plan called for 10-15 kiloton strikes on airfields in the coastal Amoy region (Xiamen). If that did not force the Chinese to withdraw or halt their operations, then nuclear strikes against the mainland would expand.<sup>187</sup>

Certain members of the State Department were very concerned about the JCS assessment that nuclear strikes would be necessary to defend the islands. Dulles was contacted by Gerard C. Smith, the Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning, suggesting the United States re-examine its commitment to the offshore islands if a non-nuclear method of defending the islands could not be found. Smith suggested that Dulles convince the JCS to "urgently" consider non-nuclear, localized defense of the islands.<sup>188</sup> Acting Secretary of State Christian Herter also expressed concerns over JCS opinion that nuclear strikes used to repel any PRC attack could

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Defense, Assistant Secretary of State and Gen Twining, *FRUS* 1958-1960 Volume XIX China, eds Harriet Dashiell Schwar, Glenn W. LaFantasie (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 52-54.

<sup>186</sup> Air Force Role in Five Crisis, NSA Archive, George Washington University, 25, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb249/doc10.pdf>.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>188</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning (Smith) to Secretary of State Dulles, Washington, August 15, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol XIX, 57. The discussion regarding the JCS specifics in utilizing nuclear weapons to defend the offshores must be implied, as eleven lines of text are still classified. It is quite clear from Herter's comments, however, that nuclear strikes were discussed.

result in nuclear retaliation against Taiwan, Okinawa or elsewhere. Herter felt the PRC could be convinced not to conduct any action against the offshore islands if the US issued a warning via the Soviet Union.<sup>189</sup>

The State Department continued through the month of August to examine and prepare US options for a confrontation with the PRC. It did not think Chiang Kai-shek could be convinced to abandon the islands. Nor did the State Department believe evacuation was a good strategy. The department feared that a Nationalist withdrawal from the islands would undermine the US position in the Far East and force the Nationalists into attacking China, resulting in a devastating counterattack by the PRC that could end in the loss of Taiwan. Additionally, the State Department did not think a withdrawal would ease tensions, since the PRCs avowed goal was to take Taiwan.<sup>190</sup>

The possibility that nuclear weapons could be used against China continued to haunt State Department thinking. According to the JCS, the islands could be supplied without using nuclear weapons, but only with difficulties. The military remained staunch in its assertion that defending the islands required the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>191</sup> The State Department still hoped that warning the PRC might be enough, and requested that the US embassy in Poland ask for a

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<sup>189</sup> Memorandum from Acting Secretary of State Herter to Secretary of State Dulles, Washington, August 15, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol XIX, 56.

<sup>190</sup> Memorandum from the Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Robertson) to Secretary of State Dulles, Washington, August 20, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol XIX, 62-65.

<sup>191</sup> Memorandum from the Regional Planning Advisor in the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs (Gree) to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Parsons), August 18, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol XIX, 59.



renewal of the Warsaw talks as soon as possible.<sup>192</sup> While the State Department worked for a diplomatic solution, the military continued with its preparations. By mid-August, SAC ordered five of its B-47 bombers, stationed on Guam, to prepare for nuclear attacks against mainland China. Additionally, SAC alerted its units to prepare targeting Chinese cities, should the crisis escalate to general war.<sup>193</sup>

On August 22, the State Department agreed to a number of actions the US could take (or already had) to alleviate tensions in the straits. In addition to adding an aircraft carrier to the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, the State Department agreed to have the 7<sup>th</sup> conduct naval exercises near the straits (but not in the straits), have Admiral Felix Smoot visit the offshore islands, increase the number of fighters on Taiwan and increase the flow of supplies to the offshore islands. Additionally, the US would consider increasing the amount of military equipment on the offshore islands, and increase shipping to Taiwan.<sup>194</sup> These actions, designed to deter the Chinese and prevent a repeat of the previous crisis, could not be implemented in time, as the Chinese army began shelling Quemoy the next day.

### **The Second Crisis Begins**

The military, already preparing for action in the straits, reacted quickly to the artillery attack. The US Navy determined on August 24, that conventional forces would be sufficient in

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<sup>192</sup> Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Poland, August 20, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol XIX, 62.

<sup>193</sup> "USAF Role in 5 Crises," (Washington D.C.: USAF Historical Division, Liaison Office, 1968) NSArchives, George Washington University, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb249/doc10.pdf>.

<sup>194</sup> Memorandum of Meeting, Washington, August 22, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol. XIX, , 67.

the short term for defending the island, but if an attack against the islands were to be stopped, “effectively and quickly,” nuclear strikes against mainland China would be necessary.<sup>195</sup> The air force, on August 26, initiated the first phase of its contingency plan, created in the wake of the first straits crisis. This three-phase plan would culminate in its final phase with expanded air operations against China, conducted under the direction of SAC.<sup>196</sup> On Taiwan, the USAF 868<sup>th</sup> Tactical Missile Squadron, with its Matador missiles, and the US Army Nike-Hercules missile batteries (air defense missiles capable of delivering conventional and nuclear warheads), both already on 24-hour alert status since January, 1958, were notified to prepare for pending action.<sup>197</sup>

On August 27, Chiang Kai-shek requested from Eisenhower that the American military conduct strikes against mainland China in and around the Quemoy region, as well as provide protection for supply convoys to Quemoy. More importantly, he asked the president to issue a public statement pledging the United States to defend the offshore islands. But Chiang’s requests did not stop there. He also suggested that Eisenhower change the command processes between the US president and Pacific command by asking for the US Far East commander be granted pre-delegated permissions to attack China without taking the time to receive orders from

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<sup>195</sup> Halperin, “The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis...” accessed April 18, 2016

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_memoranda/RM4900.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4900.html)

<sup>196</sup> “Fifth Air Force in Taiwan Crisis,” (Washington D.C.: Office of Information Services, United States Government, 1958), NSA Archive, George Washington University, accessed April 18, 2016,

<http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb249/doc12.pdf>

<sup>197</sup> Halperin, “The 1958 Taiwan Straits Crisis...” accessed April 18, 2016

[http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_memoranda/RM4900.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_memoranda/RM4900.html)

Washington.<sup>198</sup> One week following Chiang Kai-shek's requests for a public pledge to defend the islands, the administration responded through US Taiwan Defense Command. The administration affirmed US support for Taiwan, but twice reminded the Nationalist military that per the December, 1954 agreement, the United States expected the Republic of China to consult with the United States before taking any action against China.<sup>199</sup>

Choosing a correct response to the Chinese attack required an accurate assessment of Chinese intentions behind the attack. The administration felt secure in its belief that China was not planning an immediate invasion of the offshores. The US intelligence services and the State Department both thought the latest attack was a means of testing US policy and not part of a military operation against Taiwan. This assessment determined that neither China nor the Soviet Union wanted to risk general war. More importantly, both the State Department and US intelligence predicted China would continue to increase pressure on the offshore islands until the US stepped in and guaranteed their safety.<sup>200</sup> This assessment that the US must act or risk losing Taiwan, was universally shared by the military, the intelligence services, the State Department and the president.

Though the US military had already begun preparations for nuclear strikes before the first Chinese shell landed on Quemoy, military commanders knew of Eisenhower's insistence on

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<sup>198</sup> Telegram from the Embassy in the Republic of China to the Department of State, Aug 27, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, China Vol. XIX, 83-86.

<sup>199</sup> Memorandum from the Commander, U.S. Taiwan Defense Command (Smoot) to the Chief of General Staff, Republic of China (Wang), Sept. 4, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, China Vol. XIX, 128.

<sup>200</sup> Special Intelligence Estimate SNIE 100-9-59 Probable Developments in the Taiwan Strait Area, Aug. 26, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-1960, China Vol. XIX, 81.

controlling nuclear weapons. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh Burke predicted that Eisenhower would resist the JCS pressure to use nuclear weapons at the outset of the crisis. On August 26, the president did just that and rejected the use of nuclear weapons for any early military action and emphasized that any strikes against China, if necessary, would be with conventional weapons. Nuclear weapons would remain in reserve, to be used as a last resort.<sup>201</sup> Later, on August 29, the president reiterated his belief that the US should delay any use of nuclear weapons.<sup>202</sup>

Dulles began to have second thoughts about US reliance on the pentomic military, expressing his frustration with outside pressures, in the form of allied protests, interfering with US capabilities to enforce policy. Clearly, if nuclear weapons were to be constrained by allied opinion, then the basis of American policy and the usefulness of the pentomic military fell into question. The military was unified across all three branches on the utility of nuclear weapons, though Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor used Dulles frustration to point out that military flexibility (dual capability) did not suffer from such restrictions. Dulles countered that such flexibility did not matter when nuclear weapons were the only means of balance against communist numerical superiority in Eurasia.<sup>203</sup>

Once again, the Eisenhower Administration was placed in the position of choosing between the allied alliance and the military utility of nuclear weapons. For Eisenhower, Dulles and the military, their belief in the utility of nuclear weapons remained unchanged from before.

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<sup>201</sup> USAF Role in 5 Crises, 20-21.

<sup>202</sup> Memorandum of Meeting, August 29, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol. XIX, 96.

<sup>203</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Sept 2, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol. XIX, 120-121.

The president would not, however, sacrifice the support of American allies for the military gains of defending the offshore islands. There was a limit to Eisenhower's concessions to the allies, though. If the offshores were seriously threatened, the president had decided to use tactical nuclear weapons, regardless of the effect on the United States relations with its allies.

Eisenhower preferred to have the Nationalists defend the offshore islands rather than rely on the United States. The administration, therefore, decided that the United States Navy would help the Nationalists keep the islands supplied so that Nationalist troops could repulse any invasion attempt. The administration focused its efforts on how the United States could ensure supplies reached Quemoy without provoking a greater response from China. The answer was to have US warships partially escort supply ships bound for Quemoy.<sup>204</sup>

The Chinese relieved the pressure on the islands by suspending their bombardment for two days, beginning September 4. Coincidentally, on that same day, Dulles provided a statement of American intent to protect Quemoy and Matsu, and though military preparations had been made, the president was withholding action for the time being.<sup>205</sup> Two days later, Chinese Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai issued a statement calling for the resumption of Sino-American talks. Eisenhower interpreted this as an acceptance of the July 28 offer to resume the Warsaw ambassadorial talks (a series of ambassadorial meetings in Warsaw, initiated in the wake of the first crisis). The president responded publicly that he welcomed the Chinese acceptance.<sup>206</sup> The

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<sup>204</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, Aug. 28, 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 China Vol. XIX, 91-95.

<sup>205</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace*. 299-300.

<sup>206</sup> Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace*. 300.

Warsaw talks began on September 15 and essentially signaled the end of the crisis, though shelling continued sporadically till the end of the year.<sup>207</sup>

### **The Second Crisis Assessment**

Several historians have criticized the Eisenhower Administration for resorting to nuclear weapons during the Taiwan Straits crises. H.W. Brands argues that Eisenhower let events in Asia guide decision making, including nuclear policy, rather than taking the initiative and deciding in advance a course of action, claiming that Eisenhower's inaction was an attempt to let crises resolve themselves.<sup>208</sup> Like a majority of historians, though, Brands addresses issues of national security from the point of view of conflict with the Soviet Union and not looking at nuclear policy as a means of exerting local control. As seen earlier, the Eisenhower Administration had, in fact, tried very much to have a policy in place to address crises in the Taiwan Straits region. In 1954, Eisenhower recognized the threat of crisis over the offshore islands, but events overtook the administration's planning. By 1958, however, the US military had extensive policy plan in place and aimed at generating a strong, localized response to Chinese attacks on the offshore islands. The key instrument to the administration's response to both crises was utilization of tactical nuclear weapons.

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<sup>207</sup> Craig, 86-87.

<sup>208</sup> Brands, 986.

Appu Soman is also critical of the Eisenhower Administration for its reliance on nuclear weapons to defend the offshore islands. For Soman, Eisenhower placed the United States in a position of either fighting a nuclear war or surrendering the offshore islands and shattering the faith of US allies in the protective merits of the American “nuclear umbrella.” The administration’s view of nuclear weapons, according to Soman, was merely an efficient means of accomplishing a military goal and failed to recognize that the American public, along with US allies, did not view nuclear war as an acceptable means of defending the islands, especially given the low political value of the islands in world opinion.<sup>209</sup> Craig, in a similar argument, cites Eisenhower nuclear policy as eliminating the United States options for limited war, and linking global war to even the smallest of crises. Contrary to Brands, however, Craig views Eisenhower’s “wait and see” approach as a positive element in Eisenhower’s policies, and credits that ambiguity as a key factor in allowing the United States to avoid war with China and the Soviet Union.<sup>210</sup>

While Eisenhower did refrain from publicly threatening China with nuclear weapons, behind the scenes, the United States military had significantly increased its nuclear preparations to the point of near instantaneous deployment, hardly a casual “wait-and-see” approach, suggesting that the administration preferred to act after Chinese action. The administration, instead, acted before the crisis had even begun, rapidly activating tactical nuclear units in the region to prepare for the worst possible scenario, a Chinese invasion of the offshore islands.

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<sup>209</sup> Soman, “Who’s Daddy...” 396.

<sup>210</sup> Craig, 84-89.

Once the US was ready for the worst case scenario, the administration sought to achieve a diplomatic resolution for the crisis.

A growing theory in nuclear policy history is the role of public opinion in constraining US nuclear weapons utilization. T.V. Paul, for example, cites world opinion as the primary restraint preventing the US from using nuclear weapons during Korea and the Taiwan Straits Crisis.<sup>211</sup> While this is an appropriate conclusion for why nuclear weapons were not used during the Korean War, the evidence that the US did not use nuclear weapons during the Taiwan Straits crises due to the restraining influences of the public and US allies remains scant. First, the Taiwan Straits crises had little in common with the Korean War. Aside from the political value of the islands, there was no military investment of troops as was the case during Korea. Second, much of the administration believed that Chinese goals during both crises did not include the invasion of Taiwan. And third, during both cases, the Eisenhower Administration tended to dismiss the threat of Soviet intervention, so long as US actions did not threaten the national security of the People's Republic of China. In short, it could be reasonably argued that nuclear weapons were not used because neither crisis exhibited the military or political intensity to warrant their use against China, and not because public opinion had dictated they would not be used.

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<sup>211</sup> Paul, 62.



## CHAPTER FOUR: KENNEDY AND THE END OF AN ERA

In January, 1961, John F. Kennedy took the office of president, a position held for eight years by Eisenhower. The new president entered the decade intent on reforming both China and nuclear policies. In the thirty-three months that he served as president, however, Kennedy would change very little in either China policy or nuclear policy. Kennedy encountered many of the same factors and variables that influenced both China and nuclear weapons policy under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, and, just like the preceding administrations, Kennedy found himself turning to tactical nuclear weapons for containing China.

Many historians have adopted the viewpoint that the Kennedy Administration used nuclear weapons policy in an attempt to control China's strategic ambitions. Michael Schaller, for example, argues Kennedy pursued the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) with the Soviet Union in an effort to contain China's nuclear ambitions, and therefore, contain China in Asia.<sup>212</sup> Chang also supports this theory, citing Kennedy's motivations as an attempt to keep China, which he viewed as an uncontrollable element, from possessing nuclear weapons and upsetting the international order.<sup>213</sup> While pursuit of the LTBT represented a strategic policy, what is often overlooked by historians is the role of tactical nuclear weapons in Kennedy's China policy. The research in this chapter will demonstrate that tactical weapons, though not utilized as much as

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<sup>212</sup> Michael Schaller, *The United States and China: Into the Twenty First Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 152-157.

<sup>213</sup> Chang, *Friends and Enemies*...230-239.

previous administrations, still served as an additional policy tool used by Kennedy to contain China.

### **China Policy: The Kennedy Administration Assessment**

The Kennedy Administration began its term sharing the same Chinese policy goals as the Eisenhower administration, that of containment and disrupting the Sino-Soviet alliance. The new administration even agreed that the best strategy for exploiting the Sino-Soviet divide was to engage the Soviet Union with a constructive policy while adopting a confrontational policy toward China. Changes in the international environment, however, combined with the continuing threat of a new crisis with China, convinced the State Department and the JCS that it was time to reassess American China policy. The findings of the reassessment determined that Communist China did not want improved relations with the United States. For the most part, the Kennedy Administration felt that Eisenhower's China policy and American military force had successfully contained China.<sup>214</sup>

In spite of this assessment, the Kennedy Administration still found the preceding administration's execution of policy to be lacking. Kennedy's advisors felt that United States did not possess the proper sense of urgency to forestall confrontations, that previous policy reacted to events rather than working to avoid conflict.<sup>215</sup> Eisenhower's policy centered too

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<sup>214</sup> Implications for US Policy, undated, from Hong Kong (7-8), Box 23, Countries, National Security Files John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>215</sup> Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy and WWR, from R.W. Komer, Subject: Notes for Tuesday Planning Luncheon, March 6, 1961, Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

much on preventing the collapse of the Nationalist government and did not possess clearly-defined, long-term goals for coping with a permanent Communist China.<sup>216</sup> It was this flaw in Eisenhower's policy that the administration identified as the cause for US isolation from its allies in regards to China.<sup>217</sup>

To address this deficiency in China policy, the administration would have to shift from the policy goal of restoring the Nationalist government to a goal that accepted the long-lasting existence of Communist China. Any belief that Communist China would collapse, either caused externally by the Nationalists, or internally by elements dissatisfied with the Communist revolution, was in the administration's eyes, unfounded and unrealistic. Even in the unlikely event of considerable disruption within China, it was expected that the Soviet Union would intervene to prevent China from failing, no matter that there was a rift in relations between those two nations.<sup>218</sup>

Accepting a permanent Communist China meant accepting the admission of the People's Republic of China into the United Nations. Kennedy's advisors predicted Chinese admission to the UN as inevitable and likely to happen within Kennedy's first term, especially if China became a nuclear power. It was believed that the international community would want to include

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<sup>216</sup> A US Policy Toward China, undated, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>217</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, (1-2), Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>218</sup> Letter from Komer to McGeorge Bundy, July 24, 1961, Box 22A, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

China in the United Nations as a means of ensuring that nation's compliance with international nuclear arms control treaties.<sup>219</sup>

The rise of China as a nuclear armed power was one of three key issues Kennedy identified that would have to be addressed in formulating a policy. The other two factors both involved the United States relationship with its allies. The rate at which the nations surrounding China were strengthening, Kennedy felt, was too slow to adequately contain China. Finally, the United States' methods of containing China were harming the relationships between the US and its allies.<sup>220</sup>

During previous administrations, containing China required only a small allocation of resources. As China's influence grew, however, more effort from the US would be required to maintain the status quo. China's acquisition of nuclear weapons would further hamper this effort. China's first successful atomic test was expected to be a "watershed" event, comparable in magnitude to the Soviet Union's first nuclear test. Additionally, the administration predicted China would become more aggressive, in part, because it was thought Mao needed an external threat to maintain the Communist revolution, and partly because of the ideological differences between China and the United States.<sup>221</sup>

The issue of recognizing China in the United Nations and the aggressive confrontations between the United States and China alarmed US allies. The offshore islands served as a major

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<sup>219</sup> DCI Briefing, Chinese UN Representation, December 18, 1961, (2), Box 22A, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>220</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, 7, Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

point of contention between the United States and the international community. US allies feared what they called the “unpredictable risks” found within the US policy of supporting Chiang at the risk of war with Mao, and, possibly, the Soviet Union. The longer the US maintained its current offshores policy, the harder the United States would find to disengage from that policy. The challenge facing the Kennedy Administration was convincing its allies to support the American position on China. Without that support, the US could not pursue a long-term strategy of containing China.<sup>222</sup>

The Kennedy Administration thought US defense of the offshores was part of a misguided policy protecting the wrong nations from China. While Eisenhower policy focused on Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam, Kennedy considered those nations as weaknesses for the US. Maintaining these nations as allies against China required “massive US aid”. The administration feared that continued growth of Chinese power would lead to these nations becoming more accommodating toward China, especially if those nations felt the United States had lost the political will or military ability to protect them.<sup>223</sup>

The administration’s assessment singled out the rift between the Soviet Union and China as having potential for advancing US China policy. It was believed that the Soviet Union would fear a strong China, therefore, as China strengthened, the Sino-Soviet rift would intensify and the Soviet Union would become more amenable to cooperation with the United States.<sup>224</sup> The call

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 2-11.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>224</sup> Implications for US Policy, undated, from Hong Kong, 8, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

for a more flexible China policy allowed the US to exploit any opportunity that presented itself to act on this fear and approach the Soviet Union about a joint policy toward China.<sup>225</sup>

### **China Policy: The Administration's Recommendations**

On considering China policy, the Kennedy Administration explored three options very similar to the options the Eisenhower Administration explored in 1953. The actions considered ranged from full military enforcement to contain China to reducing the US strategic presence in the Pacific region. The moderate option called for long term containment by strengthening Japan, India, Taiwan and Korea to act as balancing powers in Asia.<sup>226</sup>

The administration quickly rejected direct confrontation for several reasons, many of which are the same reasons the Eisenhower Administration ruled out direct military confrontation. Military encirclement required a staggering financial investment and drained the US military of valuable, and limited, resources. The political price was deemed to be even more costly. The European allies would refuse to participate in such a policy and the Asian-Pacific nations could be driven by US actions to embrace China. Kennedy's advisors felt encircling China with the US military would encourage China to adopt a more confrontational stance toward the US. Whatever gains were to be had through direct confrontation would be temporary, at best.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, 5, Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 10.

Reversing current policy and improving relations between the two countries was considered and just as quickly rejected. The administration thought that accommodation with China granted the United States more flexibility to exploit the Sino-Soviet Rift. By adopting a more accommodating policy, however, it was felt the international community would view the United States as leading from a position of weakness. This appearance of weakness, as believed by the administration, would encourage China to expand its influence.<sup>228</sup> This reasoning is identical to that of the Eisenhower Administration, when it too, thought that failure to act aggressively would invite China to expand its influence.

The remaining option left for the United States followed a middle road between accommodation and direct conflict and became the preferred course of action. Executing that policy involved disengaging from what was seen as “unproductive aspects” of current US policy but still providing clear proof of US determination to resist the expansion of Communist China.<sup>229</sup> Additionally, this option would have to follow a narrow range of actions to avoid easing pressure on China, while not applying too much pressure and drawing the Soviet Union and China closer together.<sup>230</sup>

The administration’s recommendations on strengthening the US position in the Pacific encompassed more aid for military, political and counter-subversive activities. While all American allies were to be included, particular focus in the form of long-term aid would be

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 8-10.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> US Policy Toward Communist China, undated, 1-2, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

directed toward Japan and India. The United States would also explore methods of using Asian nationalism to US advantage. Finally, the United States would seek a means of placing responsibility for continued conflict on the People's Republic of China.<sup>231</sup>

### **China Policy: Taiwan**

Chiang Kai-Shek and the Nationalist government on Taiwan proved to be extremely problematic for Kennedy. Taiwan was a "wasting asset" as far as the administration was concerned. Kennedy's advisors predicted that the Nationalists on Taiwan would only weaken over time while Communist China would strengthen. This would occur regardless of any action the US took to prevent it. The United States would have to prepare itself for the possibility of the complete collapse of Taiwan, including its loss to China<sup>232</sup>

Much like the Eisenhower Administration, the Kennedy Administration recognized the United States had a formal obligation toward Taiwan, an obligation from which it could not disengage without a significant loss of international prestige amongst the international community, especially its Asian allies. Kennedy also recognized that if the Republic of China fell to the People's Republic of China, the United States would again suffer a crippling blow to its international prestige and future efforts to contain international communism. This risk led Kennedy to continue United States protection of the Nationalists on Taiwan, even though Taiwan no longer carried the same value for the United States as before. The price of losing Taiwan far

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<sup>231</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961 (11-12), Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 16-18.



outweighed any negative consequences from defending Taiwan. The administration even considered a localized war worth the cost if it could frustrate China's efforts to take Taiwan.<sup>233</sup>

Continued support for Taiwan meant the administration would have to mitigate one of the most damaging elements of defending the Nationalists. Chiang would have to be convinced to evacuate the offshore islands. Kennedy would provide incentive for Chiang to abandon the islands by continuing military aid through the Military Assistance Program and by increasing US presence in Far East. It was felt that modern missiles deployed on Taiwan, but under US military control, might also help to convince Chiang to abandon the islands. Other incentives included an economic plan, underwritten by the US, for Taiwan and convincing other Asian allies (Japan, India) to provide support to Taiwan.<sup>234</sup>

Historians have uncovered a range of reasons for why Kennedy chose to confront China, rather than the Soviet Union, regardless of the considerable evidence that such a choice could only lead to complications for the United States. According to Gordon Chang, Kennedy's decision was based on the president's perception that China represented the greater threat to American interests, particularly in Asia. Chinese behavior was confrontational and unpredictable, whereas Soviet behavior was more docile and thus more compatible with US goals.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961 (13-15), Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 14-15

<sup>235</sup> Chang, *Friends and Enemies*, 220-221.

For Cohen, the decision to confront China rather than the Soviet Union was based on the combination of the dynamic of the Sino-Soviet split and domestic issues. That a rift had developed between China and the Soviet Union meant that United States accommodating one side, would, through the existence of the split, harm the other. By 1960, the Soviet Union represented the only nation that possessed the military power to threaten the United States. Therefore, Cohen argues, Kennedy felt the United States was better served seeking accommodation with the Soviet Union. Cohen also points out that Kennedy faced domestic pressures from the China lobby and from anti-communist proponents. Confronting China allowed Kennedy to appear strong against communism yet still seek accommodation with the Soviet Union. By the same logic, maintaining a firm policy against China allowed Kennedy to silence criticism from those who supported Chiang and the Nationalist government.<sup>236</sup>

Schaller credits Kennedy's perception of China as an unpredictable element threatening the international order as a guiding factor in choosing a policy of confrontation. Domestic issues, too, also influenced Kennedy's decision, in a more indirect mode. The vocal China Lobby, according to Schaller, tended to silence advocates for changing China policy, thereby reducing or eliminating any alternative, more peaceable, actions from being forwarded to the president.<sup>237</sup>

While all of the above reasons are credible and supported, there is a common element that exists across three separate presidential administrations over thirteen years, that of US prestige in

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<sup>236</sup> Cohen, 188-189.

<sup>237</sup> Schaller, *The United States and China*, 153-154.

the international order. A common perception held by Kennedy and shared by his two predecessors identified unacceptable damage to the image of the United States should China gain Taiwan. This fear that the loss of Taiwan would cripple the United States ability to project itself into international stage served as a driving force for confronting China.

### **JFK and Tactical Nuclear Policy**

The administration entered its first year believing the United States defense policy was dangerously unbalanced in favor of nuclear doctrine. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, thought that Eisenhower policy had been plagued by civilian advisors who placed too much emphasis on strategic force and first strike/counterforce planning while ignoring the role of deterrent force and second strike force capability. Unlike the Eisenhower Administration, McNamara felt that tactical nuclear policy inhibited American warfighting capability and posed dangerous risks to the country.<sup>238</sup>

McNamara believed the use of tactical nuclear weapons would confuse the enemy and alienate US allies.<sup>239</sup> The utilization of tactical nuclear weapons would certainly lead to escalation in any scenario in which they were employed. Tactical weapons, in McNamara's

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<sup>238</sup> Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, (Bundy) to President Kennedy, *FRUS*, 1961-1963, National Security Policy, Volume VIII, National Security Policy, ed. David W. Malbon (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1996), 18-19.

<sup>239</sup> National Intelligence Estimate NIE 1-61 Estimate of the World Situation, January 17, 1961, *FRUS* 1961-1963 Vol VIII National Security Policy, 3-10.

opinion, lacked military utility, and the United States was better served by changing the focus of US military policy from the pentomic military to non-nuclear operations.<sup>240</sup>

Kennedy, however, disagreed, believing that tactical nuclear weapons still retained military utility. The president's counterproposal was to retain the tactical nuclear capability of the US military and strengthen its non-nuclear components.<sup>241</sup> The United States would pursue the dual capability the US Army sought after losing its budget battles over the pentomic military during Eisenhower's administration. Strengthening the non-nuclear capability of the US military, however, did not stop the continued growth of the pentomic arm of the military. Under Kennedy, tactical nuclear weapons production, which had risen considerably under Eisenhower, continued to rise and peaked under the Kennedy Administration. Nuclear weapons testing and development also continued under Kennedy, culminating in 1962, the year with the most American nuclear tests than in any other year before or since.<sup>242</sup>

The president had concerns, though, over defining the threshold for using nuclear weapons and found the lack of guidance on establishing that criteria frustrating.<sup>243</sup> Kennedy believed the best policy rested with America's allies, especially NATO. The problem, he thought, was that many US allies had not modernized their military policies to include tactical nuclear weapons. Kennedy's answer to correct that shortcoming involved the United States

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<sup>240</sup> Address by Secretary of Defense McNamara at the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, May 5, 1962, *FRUS* 1961-1963 Vol VIII National Security Policy, 278-280.

<sup>241</sup> Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy) to the President's Special Counsel (Sorensen), March 13, 1961. *FRUS* 1961-1963 Vol VIII National Security Policy, 65-68.

<sup>242</sup> Stephen I. Schwartz, *Atomic Audit: The Costs and Consequences of U.S. Nuclear Weapons Since 1940*. (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institute Press, 1998), 46-52.

<sup>243</sup> Memorandum of Conference with President Kennedy, July 27, 1961. *FRUS* 1961-1963 Vol VIII National Security Policy, 123-125.

providing tactical nuclear training to its allies.<sup>244</sup> As seen in his proposals, Kennedy clearly identified a distinction between tactical nuclear weapons and strategic nuclear weapons. Going against the advice of his defense secretary, Kennedy continued with Eisenhower's military policy, modifying it only by strengthening some of the non-nuclear capabilities while increasing tactical nuclear ability. The continued presence of the pentomic military combined with the administration's decision to continue confrontation with China ensured that any future crisis would, once again, involve nuclear weapons.

### **The Offshore Islands**

The possibility of a third Taiwan Straits Crisis occupied Kennedy's staff early in the administration. By April, 1961, the State Department and the NSC warned that the offshore islands issue remained unresolved, and that the "fighting season" was approaching.<sup>245</sup> The administration identified a requirement to develop contingency plans in case another straits crisis developed, noting that the president would need to determine which specific elements of the military would be utilized, as well as directing the diplomatic effort.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Letter from the President's Military Representative (Taylor) to the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council and Counselor of the Department of State (Rostow), April 23, 1962. *FRUS* 1961-1963 Vol VIII National Security Policy, 272-274.

<sup>245</sup> Undated Addendum from R.W. Komer, Box 21A, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>246</sup> Contingency Planning for Possible Renewed Chinese Communist Attack on the Offshore Islands, July 14, 1961, 1, Box 22, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

The Offshore islands contained a twofold danger in that the US could be dragged into the Chinese civil war and that China would continually use the islands against the US. The commitment to defending the islands would only become harder over time, particularly since it would be extremely difficult to protect the islands without nuclear weapons. The use of nuclear weapons, however, contained politically disastrous repercussions in the form of strenuous objections from America's allies. Kennedy, however, just as Eisenhower, could not separate nuclear weapons from the defense of the offshores since the administration felt that it was the ambiguous threat of nuclear retaliation, combined with the Soviet reluctance to defend China over the offshores, which served as a successful deterrent preventing the Chinese from taking the islands.<sup>247</sup>

Abandoning the islands could not be considered, since the offshore islands were recognized both by the US and China as a critical element of Nationalist morale. Yet, the next crisis, which the administration was convinced would happen, would be very difficult to obtain allied support for the US position. In order to gain more international support for Taiwan, the United States would have to disengage from its obligation to defend the offshore islands.<sup>248</sup>

Disengagement from the offshore islands proved to be very difficult given that neither Communist China nor Nationalist China could see any benefit in easing pressure on the islands. The disposition of the islands contained too much political value for both sides to allow either one to back down. Maintaining pressure on the islands served both the Nationalists and

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<sup>247</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, 32, Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

Communist China by continuing the civil war. For the People's Republic of China, the offshores were tied to Taiwan and considered an internal affair. Additionally, the offshores islands served Mao Zedong, through their occupation by Chiang Kai-Shek, as a convenient means of antagonizing the United States.<sup>249</sup>

For the US to abandon the Offshores, Chiang would have to abandon the islands as soon as possible, and withdraw voluntarily. To abandon the islands under duress of a crisis would make the US appear weak.<sup>250</sup> Chiang, however, would not abandon the islands. A policy procedure for convincing Chiang to abandon the islands was devised where the US would assure Chiang that the defensive agreements between the US and Taiwan remained, but encourage him to refrain from conducting offensive actions against the mainland from the islands.<sup>251</sup> New assurances of commitment would also be offered, hinting that Chiang should evacuate the islands. Should Chiang not evacuate the islands, the US would inform Taiwan that it would not participate in defending the offshore islands.<sup>252</sup>

The administration also developed an alternative diplomatic plan for dealing with the offshores. In the event of a new crisis, the issue would be brought before the United Nations and the United States would tie the fate of the islands to other issues with China. The feeling within the administration was that if the islands could be addressed in the United Nations, it could

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<sup>249</sup> Memorandum for McGeorge Bundy, August 25, 1961, 10. Box 22, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>250</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, 35. Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>251</sup> Memo 7 regarding GRC Premier Visit to Washington, July 27, 1961 and Position Paper, The Offshore Islands, 1-2. Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>252</sup> Strategic Framework for Rethinking China Policy, April 7, 1961, 35. Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

prevent a future crisis. Utilizing the United Nations, though, contained some risk for the United States. A UN resolution could call for evacuation of the islands; which Chiang would defy. Nor could cooperation from Communist China be counted on, as it would certainly be defiant of any attempt to interfere with the status of the offshore islands.<sup>253</sup>

The Kennedy Administration interpreted previous US policy during the Straits crisis as largely successful, identifying US military action as partially restraining Communist China during the 1954-1955 Crisis. During the 1958 crisis the administration felt that US military action had completely restrained Chinese aggression against the offshores.<sup>254</sup> In a future crisis, the administration believed China would escalate it to a level more intense than that of any previous crisis. The increased risk to Taiwan placed an emphasis on the ability of Taiwan to defend itself, particularly the Taiwanese air force. The condition of the Taiwanese air force worried the administration since it felt that the current planning failed to account for any attrition of Taiwanese air force by the PLAAF during a crisis, thereby leaving Taiwan open to attack.<sup>255</sup>

The fear that a new crisis would leave Taiwan extremely vulnerable called for a new contingency plan. This new plan would inform American allies of US determination to protect Taiwan and the offshore islands and publically reiterate the Dulles-Chiang statement from 1958 to seek political resolution over military resolution. Parts of the Warsaw negotiations would be

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<sup>253</sup> Contingency Planning for Possible Renewed Chinese Communist Attack on the Offshore Islands, July 14, 1961, 1-2. Box 22, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>255</sup> Comments on State Contingency Planning Paper on Renewed Chicom Attack on Offshores, July 24, by RWK to Bundy, 1961, 2. Box 22, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.



published to demonstrate US commitment to a peaceful process to resolution.<sup>256</sup> Finally, the issue would be brought before the UN and the US would condemn the attacks before the UN General Assembly, as well as consider forming a working group with the UN to resolve the issue.<sup>257</sup>

In summer, 1962, a Chinese troop movement along the coast caused alarm within some departments of the administration. The intelligence community interpreted the movement as a prelude to another attack on the offshore islands, possibly in an effort pre-empt a Nationalist attack on the mainland. It was believed China hoped to gain prestige amongst neutral Asian nations by instigating a new crisis. Such action by China would provide a benefit by motivating an increase in domestic production and by testing the relationship between the United States and Taiwan.<sup>258</sup> The State Department assessment differed from the intelligence community's in that they did not believe the troop movement represented any offensive action by China, but felt the movement was for defense against any Nationalist attack on the mainland.<sup>259</sup>

The international situation also seemed to present an opportune time for China to attack the offshore islands. The United States had recently suffered the embarrassment of the failed Cuban invasion. The situation in Vietnam had also improved for China, with the US

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<sup>256</sup> Contingency Planning for Possible Renewed Chinese Communist Attack on the Offshore Islands, July 4, 1961, 6. Box 22, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>258</sup> Research Memorandum SSG-2, June 22, 1962, to W. Averell Harriman, from Roger Hilsman, subject: Chinese Communist Motivations in a Possible Offshore Islands Probe, 1-4. Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>259</sup> Memorandum from Roger Hilsman to Governor Harriman, June 22, 1962, Subject: Evidence of Peiping's Concern over Possible GRC-US Intentions, 1-3. Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

increasingly getting involved, and in the summer of 1962, the Viet Cong remained a strong military opponent. And there was the continued lack of support for US offshores policy from American allies. The timing and the perceived benefits gained by China led the administration to assume that Chinese activity was the prelude to an imminent attack, but not an actual invasion of the offshore islands.<sup>260</sup>

An offshores working group was formed to explore US options to deal with the pending crisis. The scenarios explored ranged from a Chinese buildup on the mainland to a substantial military effort against the offshore islands, including amphibious operations. The scope of responses varied depending on the degree of Chinese action. Most recommendations provided material support for Taiwan, but placed the responsibility for direct military response on the Nationalists. Direct military action by the United States would be initiated only if China began amphibious operations against the offshore islands. This action would include non-nuclear strikes against the Chinese mainland. If Chinese action included an invasion of Taiwan or the Penghus islands, then the US would honor its treaty obligations with Taiwan. The working group advised that the president refrain from deciding on US policy until further action was taken by China.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> Memorandum SSG-2, June 22, 1962, to W. Averell Harriman, from Roger Hilsman, subject: Chinese Communist Motivations in a Possible Offshore Islands Probe, 1-4, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>261</sup> Memorandum to the Offshore Working Group from Joseph A. Yager, Subject: Attached Draft Outline for Contingency Planning June 25, 1962, 8, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

A policy that depended largely on the Nationalist ability to defend itself concerned both Kennedy and McNamara. Kennedy had asked specifically about comparisons of the Taiwanese air force against the PLAAF.<sup>262</sup> McNamara expressed his concern over the vulnerability of the offshore islands, and asked under what conditions nuclear weapons would be required to defend the islands. The JCS felt nuclear weapons were not necessary as long as China did not make a determined effort to take the islands.<sup>263</sup>

Soviet reaction to American policy was factored into consideration. The risk in American offshores policy lay in that a new crisis in the Taiwan Straits would pressure the Soviets to do or say something in an effort to avoid appearing weakened as the world's communist leader. American assessments of the Soviets determined they would not support China taking either Taiwan or the offshore islands. In a crisis, the administration believed Soviet reaction would likely take the form of verbal support for China while seeking a means of averting conflict between the US and China. The Soviets would also advise China to ease tensions, in order to avoid Soviet involvement in a straits crisis, especially if a US nuclear strike were imminent or a US-supported landing by Nationalists on the Chinese mainland. It was believed the Soviets would privately inform the Chinese that they could not count on Soviet support if hostilities erupted between the US and China.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Subject: Relative Operational Effectiveness of the Chinese Nationalist and Chinese Communist Air Forces, June 27, 1962, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>263</sup> Memorandum for Secretary McNamara from Maxwell D Tayler, Subject: Questions related to the Defense of the Offshore Islands, June 23, 1962, 6-8, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>264</sup> Soviet Reaction to Taiwan Straits Contingencies, Memorandum from Joseph Yager to Thomas L. Hughes, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

The working group also explored the range of actions available to the US that would not trigger Soviet interference. The group's findings determined that the United States could safely perform several operations without Soviet reaction. Among these actions included US Naval operations against the PLAAF and Chinese Navy within a three-mile limit of the mainland. Retaliatory bombardment and pursuit of PLAAF aircraft and retaliation against mainland targets near the straits were also deemed safe actions. Soviet restraint was contingent, though, on whether the US action was meant to avoid a major defeat, and US action excluded the possibility of nuclear strikes. If those contingencies were violated, then Soviet interference, up to and including direct involvement of the Soviet Air Force, was expected.<sup>265</sup> American ambassador to the Soviet Union, W. Averell Harriman met with Soviet ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin to sound out the Soviet position on the offshores situation. The meeting, however, ended inconclusively as Dobrynin deflected from the issue.<sup>266</sup>

On June 27, 1962, Kennedy enacted one of the recommendations from the offshores working group by publicly stating he agreed with Eisenhower's stance on the Taiwan Straits, as well as referencing his own remarks supporting the defense of the offshores made in October, 1960. He also tied the status of the islands to the fate of Taiwan and peace in the region. In keeping with the findings of the 1961 study, Kennedy kept his statement vague as to any specific actions the US would take, instead emphasizing the defensive posture of US military forces in

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<sup>265</sup> Soviet Reaction to Taiwan Straits Contingencies, Memorandum from Joseph Yager to Thomas L. Hughes, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>266</sup> Memorandum of Conversation, June 22, 1962, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

the region.<sup>267</sup> The fears of the administration were never realized since Mao did not attack the offshore islands. The lack of a crisis meant that nuclear planning did not possess the intensity or activity of the two crises during the Eisenhower Administration. A different crisis with China, though, would bring tactical nuclear weapons to the forefront of policy options.

### **Nuclear Policy: The Chinese Nuclear Program**

Under Eisenhower, the threat of nuclear armed China was a distant possibility, and then only with a large amount of aid from the Soviet Union. The Kennedy Administration faced an entirely different situation, with a China capable of independently developing its own nuclear weapons. A nuclear-armed China did not threaten US national security, nor was it thought China would engage in a nuclear first strike scenario. The impact Chinese nuclear weapons would have on the Taiwan Straits situation was considered minimal as the administration did not think the Chinese could use its nuclear reputation to obtain the offshore islands.<sup>268</sup>

Kennedy was more concerned about the effects of a nuclear-armed China on its neighboring countries in Asia. Utilizing its nuclear strike capability, China could apply pressure to keep the United States from providing aid to Asian nations. China could use nuclear weapons to force the acknowledgement by the rest of the world of China's status as a world power. A nuclear-armed China could impose nuclear blackmail against its neighboring countries

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<sup>267</sup> Extracts from the President's Press Conference, June 27, 1962, 1-2, Box 23, Countries, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>268</sup> A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues, October 15, 1963, 1-5. George Washington University, National Security Agency archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb488/docs/doc%2012%2010-15-63%20johnson%20study.pdf>.

while demonstrating that US nuclear power was the true danger in Asia. Asian nations, fearing two contentious nuclear powers in their midst, could seek a nuclear-free Asia. China's neighboring countries might add their support for admitting Communist China to the United Nations. Chinese nuclear capability, by the implied threat of nuclear retaliation, raised the threshold for American nuclear use, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the US nuclear force. Chinese nuclear weapons would place a strategic burden on Asian nations, leading to more dependence on the United States, including a requirement for nuclear cooperation with the US, and an increased dependence on conventional military assistance.<sup>269</sup> It was believed that fear of the Chinese nuclear program had led Taiwan to request nuclear weapons from the United States.<sup>270</sup> The US reliance on tactical nuclear weapons could cause Asian nations to fear asking the US for help in a crisis, wary of a nuclear response to a scenario involving low levels of Chinese aggression. Additionally, the more reliant the United States on tactical nuclear weapons, the more likely China and other Asian nations would insist on a nuclear free Asia.<sup>271</sup>

To forestall China's acquisition of nuclear weapons and avoid the substantial and detrimental effects that would occur to American policy, the administration explored several options to deal with the Chinese nuclear weapons program. Diplomatic efforts would focus on bringing China into the fold regarding nuclear test ban treaties and international norms for

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Telegram from Drumright (Taipei) to Secretary of State (Washington DC), June 14, 1961, Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>271</sup> A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues, October 15, 1963, 5. George Washington University, National Security Agency archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb488/docs/doc%2012%2010-15-63%20johnson%20study.pdf>

strategic weapons. These diplomatic efforts, however, were entirely dependent on China's willingness to participate. Additionally, even if China complied with a nuclear test ban treaty after its first successful nuclear test, it would not mitigate the damage suffered to the effectiveness of US nuclear forces.

Aggressive, military options were then explored as a means of delaying the development of a Chinese nuclear weapon. The JCS considered several covert actions to hamper or destroy the Chinese nuclear program.<sup>272</sup> These actions ranged from using Nationalist commandos to attack the Chinese nuclear research facilities to employing a tactical nuclear weapon, either by US forces or Soviet forces. The JCS predicted that using tactical nuclear weapons would lead to escalation and retaliation, as well as "strong criticism" from the international community. Nor was Soviet cooperation for such an effort expected.<sup>273</sup>

In spite of the anticipated negative reactions to direct military action against the Chinese nuclear weapons program, the administration still attempted to engage the Soviet Union in stopping the Chinese nuclear program. In January, 1963, Ambassador Averell Harriman spoke with a Soviet representative about the Chinese program, both were in apparent agreement that the Chinese nuclear capability must be dealt with, either through a Test Ban Treaty or by threats

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<sup>272</sup> Memorandum for Gen. LeMay, Gen. Wheeler, Adm. McDonald, Gen. Shoup, on Chinese Nuclear Development. November 18, 1963. George Washington University, NSA Archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb488/>.

<sup>273</sup> JCSM-343-63, April 29, 1963, Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Study of Chinese Communist Vulnerability, Appendix, 26-27. George Washington University, National Security Agency archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb488/>.

of “taking out” China’s nuclear facilities.<sup>274</sup> Later that year, McGeorge Bundy met with Soviet ambassador to the US, Anatoly Debrymin, and attempted to get consensus on the Chinese program. Debrymin, however, tied the issue to NATO’s nuclear posture in Europe, and used the meeting to object to the existence of the NATO multi-lateral force.<sup>275</sup>

More conciliatory action was also explored, and these included moving American nuclear weapons away from China and increasing defensive, non-nuclear military forces in the region. It was also recommended that the United States avoid the creation of a specific nuclear counterforce targeting Chinese nuclear capability, deploying medium ranged, ballistic missiles in Asia, or altering the US nuclear posture in Asia.<sup>276</sup> The last recommendation would have marked a reversal in a trend in new nuclear deployments started by the Kennedy Administration in 1961, when the air force deployed new Mace tactical nuclear weapons systems in Okinawa as part of a modernization of nuclear weapons systems in Asia.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> W. Averell Harriman account of meeting with JFK, June 23, 1963, p 3. George Washington University, National Security Agency archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <https://nsarchive.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/seaborg-diary-21-june-1963.pdf>

<sup>275</sup> Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador Debrymin, May 17, 1963. Box 410, Robert W. Komer, National Security Files, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library.

<sup>276</sup> A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability: Major Conclusions and Key Issues, October 15, 1963, 6, George Washington University, National Security Agency archives (online), accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb488/>.

<sup>277</sup> Mindling and Bolton, 233.



## **Nuclear Policy: China and India**

After the failure to secure Soviet cooperation to destroy the Chinese nuclear weapons program, Kennedy still looked upon tactical nuclear weapons as a means of containing China and maintaining the United States' defense commitments to its Asian allies. During the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, India and China engaged in a brief one-month conflict in which the Indian military was routed, and China gained free reign over the Himalayan region near the Chinese-Indian-Tibetan border, seizing the Aksai-Chin region of India. The administration was concerned that China might attack India, a major American ally, a second time. The poor performance of the Indian military during the first conflict left the administration doubting India could resist a determined attack from China. In May, 1963, the NSC discussed how the administration would respond should China attack India again. McNamara was explicit in his belief that not only were nuclear weapons required to defend India, but that nuclear weapons were preferred over non-nuclear options when defending India, particularly over sending US troops into the Himalayan region. Kennedy, while not expressing agreement or disagreement with McNamara, stated that the United States could not allow India to suffer another defeat at the hands of the Chinese.<sup>278</sup>

Control of the White House may have changed hands and parties, but American policy toward China remained relatively unchanged. The reasons can be traced to the controlling

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<sup>278</sup> News Release: Newly Released Tape Shows Nuclear Weapons Considered as Alternative to Ground War in Combating Chinese Aggression, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library online, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/About-Us/News-and-Press/Press-Releases/Newly-Released-Tape-Shows-Nuclear-Weapons-Considered-as-Alternative-to-Ground-War-in-Combating-Chine.aspx> .

variables rather than the personalities determining policy. Containment policy, the American commitment to defend Taiwan, the belief that the Soviet Union would not interfere, Chinese hostility toward the US, the all-important perception of the role of prestige in international affairs and domestic anti-communism all combined to drive Kennedy to continue the United States' policy of confronting Communist China.

Continuing the policy of confrontation meant facing the same issues as before. Much like the Eisenhower Administration, the Kennedy Administration found itself mired in the offshore islands, the result of Chiang's refusal to abandon the islands, the formal agreement to defend Taiwan and the risk to American prestige amongst the Asian nations and American allies should the offshore islands, or Taiwan, fall to China. The administration may have constructed a contingency plan to disengage from the offshores, but the political costs of losing the offshores, much less Taiwan, were deemed too high. Kennedy's public statements in the summer of 1962 left no doubt that the United States associated the offshore islands with the political status of Taiwan.

Though Kennedy never faced a situation like the Korean War, or a Taiwan Straits crisis in confronting China, he still utilized tactical nuclear weapons in considering his military options. The administration's considerations were inconsistent and belied the initial push by the administration to limit US dependence on tactical nuclear weapons. When the administration did perceive a threat to the offshore islands, tactical nuclear weapons played a much more reduced role than they did during the previous two crises. In 1958, the movement of PLAAF fighters sparked an aggressive response in nuclear preparations by the US military. In 1962, however,

the movement of PLA troops brought no direct military preparations, though such action was discussed.

Throughout 1962, and into early 1963, the administration considered a pre-emptive act of war using tactical nuclear weapons in an effort to deprive the Chinese of their own nuclear weapons. This marked a significant departure from the nuclear planning of Eisenhower and Truman. Given the considerable damage to American Asian policy should the Chinese gain nuclear weapons, it becomes understandable why Kennedy would consider some of the more extreme measures. Failing that, the administration pursued the Limited Test Ban Treaty in an attempt to bring international pressure against China to stop development of nuclear weapons. Cooperating with the Soviet Union on the LTBT also played into the American policy of exploiting the rift in the Sino-Soviet alliance. Yet China remained independent of the Soviet Union on nuclear weapons issues, and Kennedy knew this. The harsh reality for Kennedy was that the only way to stop the Chinese from obtaining nuclear weapons was to use military force.<sup>279</sup> Like the presidents before him, Kennedy was not willing to risk the international consequences of unilateral action with nuclear weapons, and refrained from using them against the Chinese nuclear weapons program.

While McNamara may have intended to significantly alter US reliance on tactical nuclear weapons, in the end, the Kennedy Administration continued the policy of the Eisenhower Administration. Gaddis has argued that Kennedy relied less on nuclear weapons for crisis

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<sup>279</sup> Gordon Chang, "Kennedy, China and the Bomb," *The Journal of American History* 74 no 4 (Mar., 1988): 1301.

management though he was much more willing to use them when compared to Eisenhower.

Kennedy tended to focus on how to conduct war rather than focus on war avoidance, as was the case during the Eisenhower Administration.<sup>280</sup>

In choosing to confront China, the Kennedy Administration had to consider all options for all possible contingencies. Tactical nuclear weapons were the one component of Kennedy policy that allowed the United States to maintain its commitment to defend Taiwan and the offshore islands in the face of direct Chinese attack, though this was not apparent to the administration in 1961. In creating the first contingency plan for defending the islands, McNamara focused on non-nuclear responses should China attempt to force the offshores issue. By 1962, though, McNamara was inquiring at what point the US would be required to utilize nuclear weapons to defend the islands. The answer was only if China made a determined effort to take the islands. Tactical nuclear weapons allowed the US to cover this scenario and thus allow the United States to guarantee its commitment to Taiwan.

McNamara may not have wholly changed his position in 1962 when he inquired about the necessity of using nuclear weapons to defend the offshore islands, but, by May, 1963, he had reversed his position and embraced the use of nuclear weapons as a means of response to China. In considering US reactions to a Chinese attack on India, McNamara turned first to using tactical nuclear weapons, rather than use a non-nuclear force. Once again, tactical nuclear

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<sup>280</sup> Gaddis, 258.

weapons provided the only practical military means of defending India from a determined attack by China.

The Chinese nuclear weapons program may not have been a threat to US national security, but it did, in a number of ways, upset the strategic balance in Asia. The Asian reaction to a nuclear-armed China, calling for a nuclear free Asia, would have deprived the United States of its greatest military advantage in confronting China, tactical nuclear weapons. Other consequences included an expensive increase in reliance on non-nuclear forces, American allies could ask for its own nuclear weapons, adding further to the danger of escalating any future crisis. Even worse for the United States, Asian nations could become more accommodating to China, and less accommodating to the United States. A nuclear-armed China would certainly be admitted to the United Nations, on its own terms. These political and military costs elevated stopping the Chinese nuclear program to a high priority in the Kennedy Administration.

The Kennedy Administration struggled to find a means to stop the Chinese nuclear program. Using tactical nuclear weapons provided the best assurance of delaying the program, but no action, no matter the size or scope, would prevent China from acquiring nuclear weapons. The administration clearly recognized the political liability of using nuclear weapons in an unprovoked act of war on China. By having the Soviets destroy Chinese nuclear research facilities, or at least cooperate in such an operation, Kennedy could avoid the political cost of nuclear use, yet still obtain the benefits of delaying the Chinese program. When the Soviets refused to cooperate, the administration still considered, though ultimately rejected, the option of using American nuclear weapons against the Chinese nuclear weapons program.

## CONCLUSION

In the years between June 1950 and May 1963, the United States repeatedly considered the option of utilizing nuclear weapons against Communist China. For the majority of these years, tactical nuclear weapons were the prevalent choice for exercising American military strength on the Asian continent. There were two dominating factors that steered American military policy toward considering the use of nuclear weapons against China. First, the perception that China had to be confronted aggressively in order to preserve American prestige as a world power, and use that prestige to prevent the expansion of communism in Asia. Second, the belief that only tactical nuclear weapons would allow the United States military to successfully restrain China on the Asian continent in the event of conflict.

Many historians recognize the importance of prestige in American policy, but link it to strategic nuclear policy, arguing that all nuclear weapons were used in the context of deterrence policies designed to prevent a China from conducting actions against US interests. Thomas Christensen, for example, argues that by incorporating nuclear weapons into a deterrence policy overemphasized the importance of the role of prestige, forcing the US to adopt an aggressive nuclear stance, lest deterrence be undermined.<sup>281</sup> The use of tactical nuclear weapons fits cleanly into coercive diplomacy model put forth by Abram Shulsky, which identifies the need for using the display or threat of excessive force to obtain concessions from an opposing government.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Christensen, 194.

<sup>282</sup> Abram N. Shulsky, *Deterrence Theory and Chinese Behavior*. (Washington DC: RAND Project-Air Force, 2000), 36.

It is clear from the research that there was a shared belief amongst the three administrations addressed in this study that prestige and the appearance of weakness, mainly by inaction or accommodation, would encourage Chinese aggression against American interests in Asia. This belief led Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy to pursue policies intended to show American strength and confront China in an effort to prevent future conflict, essentially a policy of deterrence. Once it had been determined that the United States had to adopt an aggressive stance toward China, the military component of US policy assumed a greater role than economic or diplomatic efforts. With an increased role in China policy, the presidents and the military relied on the most efficient weapons system in the US arsenal, tactical nuclear weapons.

Prestige as a variable of policy played different roles at different times. Under Truman, the lack of tactical capability threatened the deterrent value of the American nuclear stockpile. The inability to successfully execute tactical nuclear warfare in Korea was perceived to be damaging to the reputation of the American ability to retaliate. This risk of damaging US prestige served as a restraining influence against United States' nuclear policy in Korea.<sup>283</sup> When tactical nuclear weapons became abundant in numbers and capability, the role of prestige reversed. Eisenhower and Kennedy changed from restraining nuclear policy out of fear of damaging the United States' nuclear reputation, to that of employing nuclear aggression as the only means of obtaining American military goals and thus protecting the reputation of the United States as a reliable ally.

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<sup>283</sup> Gaddis, 105-106.

The viewpoint of most historians does not take into account a separate role for tactical nuclear weapons, yet two of the three presidents in this study clearly identified a distinct and separate role for tactical nuclear weapons within American China Policy. Tactical nuclear weapons allowed the United States to employ the utility of nuclear weapons within a limited war scenario without incurring the risk of general war. The application of the doctrine of tactical nuclear warfare manifested itself in American China policy during the post-Korean War planning and the Taiwan Straits crises, when the United States relied exclusively on tactical weapons to ensure military objectives. The Truman Administration is unique in that the technology of tactical nuclear weapons had not advanced enough to allow them to be considered to use in American policy. Nevertheless, Truman still sought to use nuclear weapons, first by using strategic weapons as tactical weapons, then by using nuclear weapons in a bluff maneuver for coercive diplomacy to force China to the bargaining table during the Korean War.

The alternatives to reliance on tactical nuclear weapons contained too high a political cost for the United States. Disengaging from the defense of South Korea or the offshore islands damaged the perception of the United States as an ally and questioned the American commitment to its Asian allies. Conventional military operations risked unacceptably large numbers of American casualties over a lengthy conflict and the domestic backlash such a military endeavor would entail. Using strategic nuclear weapons contained the high risk of escalating a limited war to general war with the Soviet Union. Without tactical nuclear weapons, American policy could not incorporate the defense of South Korea, Japan, Taiwan or the offshore islands into the American sphere of influence in the Pacific.



The dynamic of the US policy hinging on China as a non-nuclear power ended on three o'clock in the afternoon, on October 16, 1964, when China detonated its first atomic bomb.<sup>284</sup> Kennedy's fears that China would be immediately admitted to the United Nations were unfounded, as it took another seven years before the People's Republic of China would displace the Republic of China as a member.<sup>285</sup> The belief that the international community could somehow control China's nuclear ambitions was also unfounded, as China has not fully participated in most major nuclear non-proliferation treaties and even assisted Pakistan in obtaining nuclear weapons. In a policy similar to American efforts to deprive China of nuclear weapons, China has participated in diplomatic efforts to keep North Korea from obtaining nuclear weapons.<sup>286</sup>

After the Kennedy Administration, tactical nuclear weapons as a method of policy against China declined in consideration. During the administration of Richard Nixon, the president considered the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Vietnam, but only in the context of coercive diplomacy aimed at North Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Similar to Truman's Operation Hudson Harbor, Nixon's threat was a bluff that produced unintended results. China, which was not the target of the threats, still reacted by placing its military on alert.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai. *China Builds the Bomb*. Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2010,

<sup>285</sup> Jane Perlez, "China and South Korea Affirm Antinuclear Goals" *New York Times*, July 3, 2014, under Asia Pacific, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/04/world/asia/presidents-of-china-and-south-korea-reaffirm-push-for-north-korean-denuclearization.html>

<sup>286</sup> David B. Thomson, *A Guide to the Nuclear Arms Control Treaties*, (Los Alamos, NM: Los Alamos Historical Society, 2001), 289-321.

<sup>287</sup> Nixon White House Considered Nuclear Options Against North Vietnam, Declassified Document Reveal, The National Security Archive, George Washington University, accessed April 18, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB195/index.htm#6>

Tactical weapons themselves ceased to be a part of the active US inventory after 1992, when President George H.W. Bush ordered the tactical stockpile withdrawn from service.<sup>288</sup> The reduction of the role of nuclear weapons in China policy continues to this day. Current military policy has adopted a far less confrontational stance than that of the 1950s and now seeks cooperation with China on many matters pertaining to nuclear weapons and the international community.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Rhodes, *Arsenals of Folly*, 290-294.

<sup>289</sup> 2010 Nuclear Posture Review Report, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2010), VI. and A Chinese Perspective on the Nuclear Posture Review” by Yunzhu Yao, 2010, The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed April 18, 2016, “, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2010/05/06/chinese-perspective-on-nuclear-posture-review/r6x>

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John F. Kennedy Library Presidential Library, Boston MA.

United States National Archives, College Park, MD.

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Nuclearfiles.org

<http://www.nuclearfiles.org/>

The American Presidency Project

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>

Presidential Campaigns and Elections

<https://presidentialcampaignselectionsreference.wordpress.com/overviews/20th-century/1952-overview/>

Global Security

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/>

The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy, Yale Law School,  
Lillian Goldman Law Library

<http://avalon.law.yale.edu/>

The RAND Corporation

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